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SARAH ORNE JEWETT

by

Francis Otto Matthiessen

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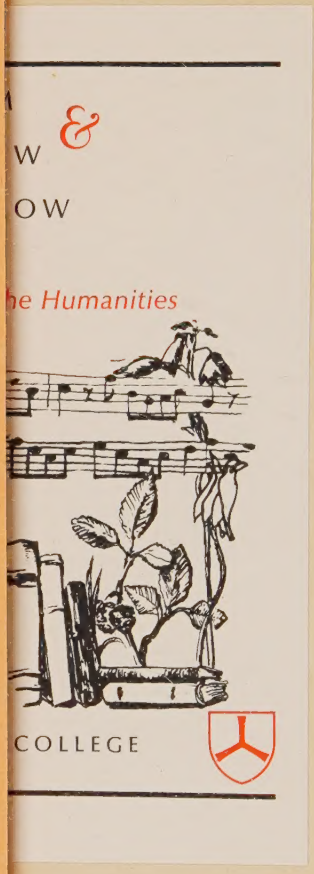
Sarah Orne Jewett

By Francis Otto Matthiessen

In her Preface to 'The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett,' Willa Cather said, 'If I were asked to name three American books which have the possibility of a long, long life, I would say at once "The Scarlet Letter," "Huckleberry Finn," and "The Country of the Pointed Firs." I can think of no others that confront time and change so serenely. The latter book seems to me fairly to shine with the reflection of its long, joyous future.'

The author of 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' Sarah Orne Jewett, friend of Howells, Aldrich, Whittier, and Henry James, is revealed with care and sympathy in this keen, vivid biography, and from its pages emerges the charming and distinguished personality of one of the greatest of all New England writers. Mr. Matthiessen, who gives evidence of an original mind and a stimulating critical faculty in this brilliant interpretation, studied at Yale, Oxford, and Harvard and is now an instructor in English at Yale University.

Illustrated



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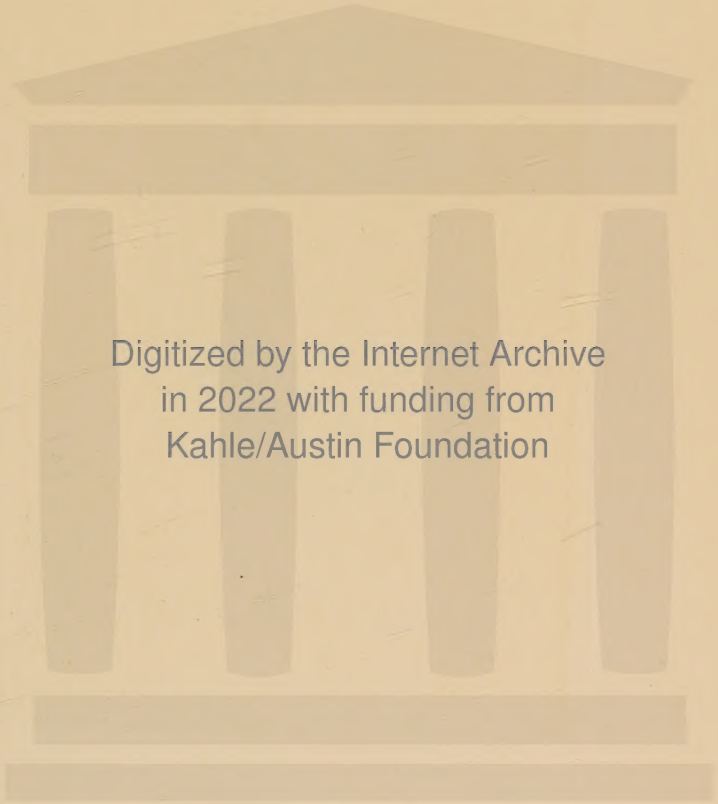
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Sarah O. Jewett

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

BY

FRANCIS OTTO MATTHIESSEN

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
LUCY ORNE MATTHIESSEN

ILLUSTRATIONS

Sarah Orne Jewett *Photogravure frontispiece*

Front Door of the Jewett House at South Berwick 2
From a painting by Russell Cheney

Sarah Orne Jewett at the Age of Eight 30
From an ambrotype

The Envelope that Brought from W. D. Howells the Acceptance of Miss Jewett's First Contribution to the Atlantic 48

Written on a Fly-Leaf of 'Deephaven' 48

The Author of 'Deephaven' 56
From a tintype

The Jewett House at South Berwick 76
From a painting by Russell Cheney

From a Letter to Mr. Horace E. Scudder on his Succeeding Thomas Bailey Aldrich as Editor of the Atlantic Monthly in 1890 92

The Drawing-Room at 148 Charles Street with Miss Jewett and Mrs. Fields 112
From a photograph lent by Mr. M. A. DeW. Howe

Hall of the South Berwick House 128
From a painting by Russell Cheney

SARAH ORNE JEWETT
(1849–1909)

I

THE first thing she could remember was a world bounded by the white paling fences around her house. There were wide green yards and tall elms to shade them. There was a long line of barns and sheds, one of which had a large room upstairs with an old ship's fore-sail spread over the floor and made a wonderful play-room in wet weather. Apples were laid out to dry there in the fall, and there were some old chests and discarded pieces of furniture to keep house with. She used to climb up on the fence next the street, and watch the people go in and out of the village shops that stood in a row on the other side, with their funny-looking upper stories bulging out over the sidewalk, and the bright red chimneys clustered together on their pointed roofs.

But the front yard she knew best belonged to her grandfather's house next door. Sarah was happiest when she could smuggle herself

into that front yard with its four lilac bushes, and the brick walk leading down to the latched gate. It was like a miracle in the spring when the yellow and white daffodils came into bloom. And later came the larkspur and the honeysuckle, Canterbury bells and London pride. A good many ladies'-delights always grew under the bushes and sprang up anywhere in the chinks of the walk or the doorstep, and a little green sprig called ambrosia was a famous stray-away. Outside the fence one was not unlikely to see a company of French pinks, which were forbidden standing room inside as if they had been tiresome poor relations. Sarah could remember the time when she couldn't look over the heads of the tiger lilies, and when she had to stand on tiptoe to pick the crumpled petals of the cinnamon roses to make herself a delicious coddle with cinnamon and damp brown sugar.

Her grandmother was a proud and solemn woman, who hated Sarah's mischief and rightly thought her elder sister a much better child. She had a prized tea-rose bush, and what should Sarah find one morning but a bud on it: it was opened just enough to give a hint of its

FRONT DOOR OF THE JEWETT HOUSE AT SOUTH BERWICK

color. Sarah was very pleased. She snapped it off at once, for she had heard so many times that it was hard to make roses bloom, and ran in through the hall and up the stairs, where she met her grandmother on the square landing. She sat down in the window-seat, and Sarah showed her proudly what was crumpled in her tight warm fist. She could see it — it had no stem at all — and her grandmother's face for many years.

Sarah was afraid of her grandmother when she was in the house, but shook off even her authority, and forgot she was under anybody's rule when she was out of doors. She said afterwards that she had been first cousin to a caterpillar, if they called her to come in, and own sister to a giddy-minded bobolink when she ran away across the fields, which she did very often. It was not until later that she grew to love the house itself. It had been built in the days of the Revolution, and behind its brass knocker and solid, panelled door opened a deep hallway, out of the rear lights of which one caught a glimpse of flagstones and a horse block for the carriage entrance, through a posted gateway into the great garden with its

pear and apple trees, and a long row of Lombardy poplars beyond. It was said that it had taken three men a hundred days to do the wood carving of that hall and its wide arch and easy stairway which led past the broad landing and pulpit window to the floor above. The block paper on its walls had been brought over from England, as had many of the spindle-legged or claw-footed chairs in the eight square rooms that gave on it above and below, the stately mahogany in the library and parlor on either side, the Adam mirrors and Chinese vases, the willow pattern and Lowestoft in the breakfast room. In an ell to the rear was the kitchen, a comfortable line of kettles and ladles glinting in front of the enormous fireplace. In one of the four-posted beds upstairs Sarah Jewett had been born, and although she spent the first years of her childhood in the house next door, she was always to think of this as home.

The night her grandmother died remained fresh in her mind. All the family were at the great house, and she could see that lights were carried hurriedly from one room to another. A servant came to fetch her, but she would not go. Her grandmother was dying, whatever

that might be, and she was taking leave of every one — she was ceremonious even then. Sarah did not dare go with the rest. She was afraid to be with the dying woman, and she was afraid to stay at home alone. She was only five years old. It was December, and the sky seemed to grow darker and darker. She went out at last to sit on a doorsill, and began to cry softly to herself. She heard some steps, and the front bell rattled loudly, but she did not move. When her mother finally came back, her face pale and tear-stained, she found her there cold and in terror. . . . But as for the funeral, it gave Sarah vast entertainment; it was the first grand public occasion in which she had taken any share.

Her world soon expanded to include the village. She kept no more cherished memories than the times she had gone to call on Miss Cushing, an elderly friend of her mother's who lived in a most pleasant and stately fashion. Sarah used to put on her very best manner, and had no doubt that her thoughts were very well ordered, and her conversation as proper as she knew how to make it. She could remember that she used to sit on a tall ottoman,

with nothing to lean against, and her feet were off soundings, she was so high above the floor. They discussed the weather, and Sarah said that she went to school (sometimes) or that it was now vacation, as the case might be, and they tried to make themselves agreeable to each other. Presently the lady would take her keys out of her pocket, and sometimes a maid would come to serve them, or else the lady herself would bring Sarah a silver tray with some pound-cakes baked in hearts and rounds, and a small glass of wine. Sarah proudly felt that she was a guest, and a thrill of satisfaction went over her for her consequence and importance. A whole handful of sugarplums would have seemed nothing beside this entertainment. She was careful not to crumble the cake, and ate it with her gloves on, and a pleasant fragrance would cling for some time afterwards to the ends of the short lisle-thread fingers. Sarah had no doubt that her manners as she took leave were almost as distinguished as those of her hostess, though she might have been a wild and shy thing all the rest of the week.

The village of Berwick which she was grow-

ing to know had been built at the head of the tidewater of the Piscataqua River, a dozen miles up from Portsmouth. Just below the village this is joined by the Salmon River, and with the great inflow from the sea the two make a magnificent stream, bordered on its seaward course by high wooded banks of dark pines and hemlocks and long green fields that slope gently to lines of willows at the water's edge. Above tidewater the two rivers are barred by successive falls. You hear the noise of them by night in the village like the sound of the sea, and this good water power so near the coast, beside a great salmon fishery famous among the Indians, had brought the first English settlers to the town as early as 1627.

Shipbuilding had become the powerful trade. A little way up the shore from Sarah's house was the shipyard, and not very many years before she was born new vessels had still been launched there. Her grandfather was part owner of most of them, and the names of the ships Perseverance and Pactolus, the barque Sea Duck, the brigs Hero and John Henry, and the schooner Dart had all been familiar to her from babyhood. Her grand-

father, Theodore Furber Jewett, was a sea captain. The son of a New Hampshire landowner who traced his American stock back to the founders of Rowley, Massachusetts, in 1639, young Jewett had been bound out as a boy, but had run away and shipped on a whaler for the Pacific. On his return he could boast among his adventures that he and two companions had been left on an uninhabited island to guard stores and secure seals, and had lived there almost a year. The sea was henceforth his life, and at the time of the Embargo he ran a vessel to the West Indies, was captured by an English privateer, and confined on the famous Dartmoor prison ship. After the War of 1812 he settled down, became a shipowner and merchant, flourished in the West India trade, and married four times.

Sarah kept rich memories of him. Her ears had been quick to hear the news of a ship's having come into port, and she delighted in the elderly captains with their sea-tanned faces who came to report upon their voyages, and to dine cheerfully and heartily with her grandfather, an eager listener to their exciting tales of great storms on the Atlantic, and winds that

blew them north-about, and good bargains in Havana, or Barbadoes, or Havre. Sarah listened eagerly too. Her grandfather seemed to be a citizen of the whole geography. And she was always hearing stories of three wars. There was the siege of Louisburg, then the Revolution, in which some of her father's ancestors had been 'honest but mistaken Tories,' and her mother's, the Gilmans of Exeter, had 'taken a nobler part.' And as for the War of 1812, 'the last war,' as everybody called it, it was a thing of yesterday in the town.

She heard too of the great excitement in Portsmouth when French ships came in looking like gardens, for the Frenchmen had lettuces for salads and flowers growing in boxes that were fastened on the decks. Some time later this story took on significance for Sarah. She found an exquisite little water-color painting of a carnation, with the quaintly written request that charming Sally will sometimes think of poor Ribère, who will never forget her. That was all that was left of a tender friendship between a gallant young Frenchman and her grandmother. Sarah

found it once among her grandmother's copy books and letters from her girl friends, and love letters from Sarah's grandfather which he sent home to her from sea. She must have been very young when the poor Ribère was so sorry to part from her, for she was married at eighteen, and died at twenty-five. Sarah knew very little about her until she discovered in the garret the brass-nailed trunk that told her these secrets.

This charming Sally, her own namesake Sarah Orne, the daughter of a Portsmouth sea captain, was Sarah's real grandmother, and not the old lady she had known. It was not until after his first wife's death in 1819 that Captain Jewett moved his children up to South Berwick, bought the principal house in the village, the old Haggens mansion, and extended his interests in shipping; building ships and buying large quantities of timber from northward and eastward, and sending it down the river to the sea. This business was still going on in Sarah's childhood, and the manner of its conduct was primitive enough. The barter system still prevailed. The men who brought the huge sticks of ash and pine

timber for masts and plank were rarely paid in money, which was of small use in their remote and thinly settled districts. When the sleds and long trains of yoked oxen returned from the river wharves to the stores, they took a lighter load in exchange, of flour and rice and barrels of molasses, of sugar and salt and cotton cloth and tea and coffee; in fact, all the household necessities and luxuries that the northern farms could not supply. They liked to have some money to pay their taxes and their parish dues, if they were so fortunate as to be parishioners, but they needed little besides.

So Sarah came in contact with the up-country people as well as with the sailors and shipmasters. She lingered about the busy stores, and listened to the graphic country talk. When the great teams came in sight at the head of the village street, she ran to meet them over the creaking snow, to mount and ride into town in triumph. But it was not many years before she began to feel vaguely sorry at the sight of every huge lopped stem of oak or pine that came trailing along after the slow-stepping, steaming oxen. She learned

far more than she realized of a fashion of life already on the wane, and of that subsistence on sea and forest which was already a forgotten thing in New England when she was grown.

In her grandfather's business household, his second son, Theodore Herman Jewett, unconscious of tonnage and timber measurement, of the markets of the Windward Islands or the Mediterranean ports, 'had taken to his book,' as the old people said, and graduated from Bowdoin, and then studied medicine with Dr. Perry in Exeter, and gone away to Philadelphia to take his degree, and had felt that devotion to the study of his science which ended only with his life. He was made Professor of Obstetrics at Bowdoin, his contributions to scientific journals were numerous and notable, and he was President of the Maine Medical Society for many years. But chiefly he was the man whom his daughter attempted to draw in her story of 'A Country Doctor,' though she knew her portrait inadequate to the gifts and character of the man himself. He settled to practise in Berwick, and was married at twenty-seven to Caroline Frances Perry, the gentle delicate daughter of his

former teacher and Abigail Gilman, both of old Exeter families. His wife gave birth to three girls, Mary, Sarah, and Caroline.

Dr. Jewett had inherited from his father a wide knowledge of human nature, and from a strain of French blood in his mother's ancestry a lightness and gaiety of heart. Through all the heavy responsibilities and anxieties of his busy professional life and the steady drain on his energy, he remained amazingly young, even boyish. His visits to his patients often refreshed them as much by the touch of his personality as by the medicines he brought. Sarah knew many of those patients on the lonely inland farms and in the fishermen's cottages at York and Wells. She used to follow her father about silently, like an undemanding little dog, content to be at his side. When he let her ride up-country with him, she sometimes waited outside with the horse, but other days she went and sat in the kitchen and ate the piece of gingerbread that had been baked for 'the doctor's girl.' She had no consciousness of watching or listening, or indeed of any special interest in the houses or people. But her father kept pointing things out to her.

He talked to her about books, too, and gave her her first and best knowledge of them by his own delight and dependence upon them, and ruled her early attempts at writing by the severe simplicity of his own good taste. 'Great writers don't try to write *about* people and things, they tell them just as they are.' How often such words fell upon Sarah's young ears without her comprehending them. But while she was too young and thoughtless to share in his enthusiasms for Fielding and Smollett, 'Don Quixote' and 'Tristram Shandy,' her mother was leading her into the pleasant ways of 'Pride and Prejudice' and 'Cranford.' The old house was also well provided with thick shelves of leather-bound books of a deeply serious nature, sermons and histories, and in her curiosity she had soon pried into everything from her father's medical tomes to the 'Arabian Nights.' She could find something vital in even the driest and in the more entertaining she was completely lost.

It was a different matter when Mary and she went to school at the Berwick Academy on top of the hill. She liked the other children who came there not only from the village, but

from as far away as Cuba, since the school was already seventy years old and of a high name. She remembered the breathless thrill when these friends opened packages from the West Indies. She and Mary enjoyed the guava jelly, and her sister has confessed, 'I'm afraid we enjoyed the cigarettes.' Sarah also liked to read and to write verses, but she was given to long childish illnesses and to instant drooping whenever she was shut up in school. She had apparently not the slightest desire for learning, but her father was generally ready to let her be his companion on those long drives about the country. He was always amused and patient with this heedless child, inclined far more to dreams than to accuracy. He was impatient only with affectation or insincerity. He lifted her up over the carriage wheel, and jumped in himself from the other side. He took the reins in his firm hand, and gave a cluck to the horse. The carriage leapt forward (her father's driving was the admiration of the village), and Sarah snuggled against his shoulder and breathed a little sigh of satisfaction. She was lost in radiance for the rest of the afternoon. Only a great many years later

she recalled wise things her father had said and the things he had made her see.

Suddenly they turned off the main road into a lane, and pulled up before a low-roofed white wooden house. The noise of wheels grating over rocks brought a thin girl around the corner from the vegetable patch behind. She was hardly older than Sarah, but was carrying a hoe. When she saw it was the doctor she laid it down, and went inside the door without a word. Sarah's father took his bag from under the seat, jumped down from the carriage, and followed her. Presently the door opened once more, and the girl picked up her hoe, and disappeared again around the corner. Sarah looked in vain for any truckle-cart in the yard, or a doll, or bits of broken crockery laid in order on a rock. She knew that this girl's mother was a cripple, that she had to sit all day long in a chair, and couldn't even lift her food to her mouth. Sarah never went into this house, but once she had caught a glimpse of the woman through the open door, sitting back from the window, but from where she could look down the lane. A half-withered rose lay on the table beside her. Sarah knew

that some days nobody came up the lane, and that the woman's only entertainment must have been to watch the wild birds that ventured near the house and the clouds that blew across the sky. Sarah had found her first anemones in this lane.

As they were leaving, the man came up, driving a team. He was just back from hauling timber, and took the doctor aside to talk. Sarah caught only broken sounds above the scraping of the horses . . . '. . . buried to-day that was struck by lightnin' . . . comin' acrost a field when a great shower begun. The lightnin' stove through his hat and run down all over him, and ploughed a spot in the ground.'

They stopped at one or two other places farther along. Sarah observed how almost every house had plots of gay flowers in front, carefully hedged with barrel staves to keep out the miscreant hens. Calves were tethered in shady spots, and puppies and kittens were adventuring from doorways. They met some people, walking sedately, dressed in their best clothes. They were coming from the funeral; the dead man's house was down the road. The

occasion was nearly ended by this time; the funeral supper had been eaten and the borrowed chairs were being set out in the yard in small groups. The new grave showed plainly in the field near by. As they turned home, she saw the last of the columbines clinging to a hillside. Meadow rue and red and white clover were just coming into bloom down in the small fenced meadows belonging to the farms. The buttercups were thicker than the grass, and mulleins stood straight and slender among the pine stumps.

The carriage creaked up Great Hill. The last June sunlight was catching the fields of young grain and the wooded slopes away toward the dim New Hampshire hills on the northern horizon. Mount Agamenticus stood seaward, dark with its pitch pines, and the far sea itself, blue and calm, ruled the uneven country with its unchangeable line.

II

HER grandfather died in her eleventh year, and presently the Civil War began. From that time the old village life was at an end. The provincial character was fading out. Shipping had long been at a disadvantage, and no more bronzed captains were coming to dine now and bringing great red jars of olives from the Indies, and bags of filberts or oranges to delight a child. Sarah remembered thinking it very odd that the smooth green bank where the dandelions were so bright in the spring should still be called the shipyard, and wondering why old people kept referring to that corner of the town as the Lower Landing, since nothing ever seemed to land except the fleets that she and the others built of chips and shingles. Once in a great while a stray packet or a gundalow with its high, peaked lateen sail still brought some freight up the river, but the shipwright's hammer would never be heard again. Berwick was no longer an inland port, a busy artery between Santo Domingo and London. It was an up-country station on a

branch railway line, grappled by bonds of steel and wire to Lawrence and Lynn.

Throughout New England the invigorating air that Emerson and Thoreau had breathed was clogged with smoke. A mile away from Sarah's house the textile mills at Salmon Falls were employing larger and larger numbers, and rows of drab rickety houses were growing like mushrooms overnight. The native village folk were slowly crowded out by Irish immigrants. Their hearts were not destined to know the bold resolve and high achievement of Sarah's grandfather. They were not to glean strange knowledge of the world from the lips of friends who had been to Archangel and Marseilles, but to learn their rumors fourth-hand from a dingy local paper. They clung grimly to their stony farms and mouldering fishing shacks and worked out their uneventful lives cheered only by the bright memory of the past. A woman was counted lucky if she could find a husband in the dwindling countryside, and her son was also lucky if he could land a job in the mill along with the foreigners, and didn't have to shoulder a lean pack, and take the cars for the

West. Sarah Jewett was growing up in a period of decline. The village's proud feeling of self-sufficiency was gone forever.

Naturally she did not realize all these changes until some time afterwards. By the end of the war she had become a tall slender girl, never very strong, but full of bursts of energy, a deep flush covering her dark cheeks, a quick fire in her large brown eyes. She spent her days outdoors whenever she could. Mud or no mud she saddled Sheila, whose name she pronounced in the German manner because she occasionally shied, and went off in search of two or three strips of dry sandy road where she could have a 'hurry.' She carefully avoided puddles for an hour or so, but finally pulled up her long skirt and splashed home contentedly. She loved the loneliness of silent, forgotten places, to sit with her back against the fireplace of the deserted house that had once been the parsonage of the North Parish, and wonder what kind of people had lived there; to let her boat drift after a violent spurt, and look up through the trees at the sky or at their reflection in the ripples of the oars; or to let it stop altogether until she could watch the

first fish come back to their playground on the yellow sand and gravel, and the frogs, that had flopped into the water at her approach, poke their heads out a little to croak indignantly. The swallows darted along the surface of the water after insects, and she saw a drowned white butterfly float by, and reached out for it: it looked so frail and woeful in the river.

Many years later she wrote in a letter to Whittier, 'Nobody has mourned more than I over the forsaken farmhouses which I see everywhere as I drive about the country out of which I grew, and where every bush and tree seem like my cousins.' And one of her first real sorrows came from these trees. She was always saying how certain of them seemed to have just as much character as people. And then in one of her early sketches she had to record: 'The woods I loved best had all been cut down the winter before. I had played under the great pines when I was a child, and I had spent many a long afternoon under them since. There never will be such trees for me any more in the world. I knew where the flowers grew under them, and where the ferns were greenest, and it was as much home to me

as my own house. They grew on the side of a hill, and the sun always shone through the top of the trees as it went down, while below it was all in shadow.' The increasing destruction of her world gave her a hunted feeling like the last wild thing left in the woods.

Autumn days she would take Jock or Crabby, and walk. The wind blew straight in from the sea. There was a tinge of red still lingering on the maples, and her dress brushed over the late golden-rods, while old Crabby, who seemed to have taken a new lease of youth, jumped about wildly and raced after the birds that flew up from the long brown grass — the constant chickadees who would sing before the coming of snow. But this day brought no hint of winter. She leapt over a fence, and took great strides down the valley. She was off to call on some particular friends. After several miles she climbed a low hill, and went down through the familiar pasture lane. At that moment she saw her father drive away up the road, just too far to make him hear her when she called. But she reflected that he would come back again over the same way, and in the meantime she could pay her visit.

The house was low and long and unpainted with a great many frost-bitten flowers about it. Some hollyhocks were bowed down despairingly, and the morning-glory vines appeared more miserable still. Sarah heard a loud whirring noise inside, and through the open door saw Miss Polly Marsh and her sister, Mrs. Snow, stepping back and forward together spinning yarn at a pair of big wheels. They went together like a pair of horses, and kept step with each other to and fro. They were about the same size, and were cheerful old bodies, looking a good deal alike, with their checkered handkerchiefs over their smooth gray hair, their dark gowns made short in the skirts, and their broad feet in gray stockings and low leather shoes without heels. They stood straight, and though they were quick at their work they moved stiffly. They were talking busily about some one.

'I could tell by the way the doctor looked that he didn't think there was much of anything the matter with her,' said Miss Polly Marsh. '"You needn't tell me," said I the other day, when I see him at Miss Martin's. "She'd be up and about this minute if she only

had a mite o' resolution." And says he, "Miss Polly, you're as near right as usual,"' and the old lady stopped to laugh a little. 'I told him that wa'n't saying much,' she said, with an evident consciousness of the underlying compliment and the doctor's good opinion. 'I never knew one of that tribe that hadn't a queer streak and wasn't shif'less, but they're tougher than ellum roots,' and she gave the wheel an emphatic turn, while Mrs. Snow, reaching for more rolls of wool, happened to see Sarah.

'Wherever did you come from?' they asked in great surprise. 'Why, you wasn't anywhere in sight when I was out speaking to the doctor,' said Mrs. Snow. 'Well, now, we're pleased to see ye.'

Sarah begged them not to stop spinning, but they insisted they should not have turned the wheels a half-dozen times more, even if she had not come, and they pushed them back to the wall before they sat down to talk with her over their knitting. Miss Polly was Sarah's special friend, for she was a famous nurse, often in demand all through that part of the country, and had come to take care of her during a long

illness one winter. Now she brought her a stout pitcher of sweet cider, and the three of them sat together, gossiping. Sarah told all the village news she could think of, while Miss Polly darted from her chair occasionally to catch stray wisps of wool which the breeze through the door blew along from the wheels. A gay string of red peppers hung above the high mantelshelf, and the woodwork in the room had never been painted and had grown brown with smoke and scouring. A bouquet of asparagus and some late sprigs of larkspur and white petunias stood on the table, and a Leavitt's Almanac lay on the county paper that was itself lying on the big Bible, of which Miss Polly made a point of reading two chapters every day 'in course.' Sarah remembered having heard her say despairingly one night to herself, 'I don't know but I may skip the Chronicles next time,' but didn't believe she ever had.

'Who was it you were talking about as I came in?' she asked. 'You said you didn't believe there was much the matter with her.' And Miss Polly clicked her needles faster, and told her it was Mary Susan Ash, over by Little Creek.

'They're dreadful nervous, all them Ashes,' said Mrs. Snow. 'You know young Joe Adams' wife, over our way, is a sister to her, and she's forever a-doctorin'. Poor feller! *he's* got a drag. I'm real sorry for Joe, but land sakes alive! he might 'a known better. I've lost every mite of patience with her. I was over there last week one day, and she made out she'd got the consumption, and she told how many complaints she had, and what a sight o' medicine she took, and she groaned and sighed, and her voice was so weak you couldn't more than just hear it. I stepped right into the bedroom after he'd been prayin' with her, and was takin' leave. You'd thought, by what he said, she was going right off then. She was coughin' dreadful hard, and I know she hadn't no more cough than I had. So says I, "What's the matter, Adeline? I'll get ye a drink of water. Somethin' in your throat, I s'pose. I hope you won't go and get cold and have a cough." She looked as if she could 'a' bit me, but I was just as pleasant's could be. Land! to see her laying there, I suppose the poor young feller thought she was all gone. I wish he had seen her eating apple dumplings for dinner. She

felt better 'long the first o' the afternoon before he come. I says to her, right before him, that I guessed them dumplings did her good, but she never made no answer. She *will* have these dyin' spells. Poor Joe, he come over for me last week another day, and said she'd been havin' spasms, and asked me if there wa'n't somethin' I could think of. "Yes," said I, "you just take a pail o' stone-cold water, and throw it square into her face. That'll bring her out of it." And he looked at me a minute, and then he burst out a-laughin' — he couldn't help it. He's too good to her. That's the trouble.'

'You never said that to her about the dumplings?' asked Miss Polly, admiringly. 'Well, *I* shouldn't ha' dared,' and she rocked and knitted faster than ever, while they all laughed. 'Now with Mary Susan, it's different. I suppose she does have the neurology, and she's a poor broken-down creature. She had a dreadful tough time of it with her husband, shif'less and drunk all his time. Noticed that dent in the side of her forehead, I s'pose? That's where he liked to have killed her; slung a stone bottle at her.'

'What!' gasped Sarah, very much shocked.

'She don't like to have it inquired about, but she and I were sittin' up with 'Manda Damer one night, and she gave me the particulars. I knew he did it, for she had a fit o' sickness afterward. Had sliced cucumbers for breakfast that morning, he was very partial to them, and wanted some vinegar. Happened to be two bottles in the cellar-way just alike, and one of them was vinegar and the other had sperrit in it at hayin'-time. He takes up the wrong one and pours on quick, and out come the hayseed and flies, and he give the bottle a sling, and it hit her there where you see the scar. Might put the end of your finger in the dent. He said he meant to break the bottle agin' the door, but it went slantwise, sort of. I don't know, I'm sure.... She had good prospects when she married him. Six-foot-two and red cheeks and straight as a Noroway pine ——'

'Here comes your father,' broke in Mrs. Snow. 'Now we mustn't let him get by or you'll have to walk way home.' And Miss Polly hurried out to speak to him, while Sarah gathered up her fading bunch of fringed gentian, and followed her with Mrs. Snow.

She could talk to her father now, not as a daughter but as one of his friends. They ranged from Miss Perkins' sciatica and the state of the poor on the town farm to theology and law and nonsense. She knew his papers, his books, his medicines almost as thoroughly as if she were a doctor herself. Not a corner of his mind or work was foreign to her. No wonder that in later years she always said, 'I look upon that generation as the one to which I really belong — I who was brought up with grandfathers and grand-uncles and aunts for my best playmates. They were not the wine one can get for so much the dozen now.' It was not only the companionship of her father, but that whole fading world which continued to hold the center of her affections. Near the turn of the century she was writing to Sara Norton: 'I have had to go to Exeter several times lately, where I always find my childhood going on as if I had never grown up at all, with my grand-aunts and their old houses and their elm trees and their unbroken china plates and big jars by the fireplaces. And I go by the house where I went to school, aged eight, in a summer that I spent with my grandmother,

SARAH ORNE JEWETT
At the age of eight

and feel as if I could go and play in the sandy garden with little dry bits of elm-twigs stuck in painstaking rows. There are electric cars in Exeter now, but they can't make the least difference to me.'

No difference to her, for her memories were secure. But New England wasn't. When Miss Jewett grew fully conscious of what was happening she stated: 'People do not know what they lose when they make away with the reserve, the separateness, the sanctity of the front yard of their grandmothers. It is like writing down the family secrets for any one to read; it is like having everybody call you by your first name and sitting in any pew in church, and like having your house in the middle of a road, to take away the fence which, slight as it may be, is a fortification round your home. More things than one may come in without being asked; we Americans had better build more fences than take any away from our lives.'

Long before she had such reflections the world of her own imagination had become more real to her than any other. When she was thirteen or fourteen she had read 'The Pearl of Orr's Island,' Harriet Beecher Stowe's

novel about the people who lived in the decaying shipless harbors of Maine. Its first chapters opened her eyes. Her father had already instilled in her his keen interest in the quiet village life and the dull routine of the farms. And now she began to follow the old shore paths from one gray, weather-beaten house to another more eagerly than ever before.

She wrote down the things she was thinking about. At first she generally put them into rhymes for prose seemed more difficult. Then she began telling herself stories, and giving them fancy names, 'The Girl with the Cannon Dresses' and 'The Shipwrecked Buttons.' One summer she hit on the bold scheme of sending some of them to a children's magazine, 'Our Young Folks' or 'The Riverside.' She was very shy of speaking about such audacity to any one at home, and pledged Mary to utter secrecy. She even sent off her first manuscripts under an assumed name, Alice Eliot. Then came the ordeal of having to ask the postmistress for those mysterious and exciting editorial letters, which she announced on the post-office list just as though Miss Alice C. Eliot had been a stranger in the town.

Horace Scudder, editor of 'The Riverside,' was very kind. He accepted 'The Shipwrecked Buttons' at once, and sent her a nice letter of encouragement. She wrote a far more elaborate story about how a New England girl's father had brought home company unexpectedly, among them a young Englishman, Mr. Bruce. The waitress was out so his daughter Kitty blithely took her place. The next year Mr. Bruce was naturally amazed to meet Kitty in Baltimore society, but the ensuing complications were at last unravelled, and marriage was the result. Sarah Jewett, made brazen by success, sent this to 'The Atlantic Monthly,' of which James T. Fields was editor. She received some notes of suggestion without any signature. She wrote back, addressing herself 'to the Editor with the fine handwriting.' His name turned out to be William D. Howells. 'Mr. Bruce' was accepted. It appeared in the 'Atlantic' for December, 1869.

Mr. Scudder hastened to send her a letter of congratulations. He ventured on a word or two of criticism, but quickly checked himself. Whom was he writing to? He had thought her

some young girl just beginning to make up stories for children, and here she had turned out to be a contributor to the most distinguished magazine in America. He apologized gracefully and got this answer:

South Berwick
30*th Nov.*, 1869

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your kind note and especially for your criticisms on my two Stories. They will help me I know. You were right about Mr. Bruce, and if I were talking instead of writing I could tell you of ever so many other things that might have been very different. I couldn't expect to be perfect. In the first place I couldn't write a perfect Story, and secondly I didn't try very hard on that. I wrote it in two evenings after ten when I was supposed to be in bed and sound asleep, and I copied it in part of another day. That's all the work I 'laid out' on it. It was last August and I was nineteen then, but now I'm twenty. So you see you are 'an old hand' and I 'a novice' after all.

Do you remember in 'Mr. Bruce,' I made

'Elly' say that like Miss Alcott's 'Jo' she had the habit of 'falling into a vortex'? That's myself, but I mean to be more sensible. I mean to write this winter and I think you will know of it. I like the 'Riverside' and what you have written, and you are delightful to have dear old Hans Andersen. I don't see the 'Riverside' regularly though. I'm not a bit grown up if I am twenty, and I like my children's books just as well as ever I did, and I read them just the same. I'd like to see the Buttons in print; you said the 18th I think. It's a dreadful thing to have been born very lazy, isn't it, Mr. Scudder? For I might write ever so much; it's very easy for me, and when I have been so successful in what I have written, I ought to study — which I never did in my life hardly, except reading. And I ought to try harder and perhaps by and by I shall know something and can write really well. — There was no need for me to write this note and I'm a silly girl? I know it. But your letter was so very nice and you are kind to be interested in my stories. So I beg your pardon and will never do so any more. You said you had seen my name before. It was some verses — 'The

Old Doll' — two years ago, I think. I must hunt them up. I believe they were very silly.

Yours very respectfully and gratefully

'ALICE ELIOT'

Success had by no means deprived Horace Scudder of his valuable contributor. Within a month he heard again:

DEAR SIR:

I found this the other day and I liked the idea and have written it all over except for two verses. Will it do for you? . . . I can't tell about the verses I write half as well as I can the stories and I don't know whether this is good for anything, or not. But you can tell in two minutes and if you think it's very silly, and I'm weak-minded to have sent it, imagine me asking your pardon with a most penitent expression of countenance. Thank you for the 'Riverside' which came yesterday.

Very respectfully

ALICE ELIOT

P.S. I've been reading your 'Stories from My Attic,' and it's very nice. . . . I was quite affected when I found the furniture went in

procession down stairs and that you had to go away. My local attachments are stronger than any cat's that ever mewed and I should break my heart if I had to leave my room, which is called bad and disrespectful names by the rest of the family, however! I think I shall write a story about it someday by way of warning to young women in general.

Her horizon was widening. She took more frequent trips to Boston. She made long visits with her friends in Philadelphia and Brooklyn, and went as far west as Green Bay, Wisconsin, one summer, and was away from home for over six months. But the prairies seemed to her like reading the same page of a book over and over, and she was glad to get back again to her Maine hills. She became acquainted with the editors of the 'Atlantic,' and was introduced through them to nearly everybody. Mr. Howells, who was already growing prominent as a novelist, was particularly friendly, and Sarah found more than one occasion to say:

I cannot wait any longer before writing you a note to thank you for 'Their Wedding

Journey.' I am enjoying it so much and this last number is so good! It seems unnecessary, though, for you to improve, for people were so satisfied before, and there are so many dear stupid writers who will go on and on in the same fashion till they die. I have taken great pleasure in the November number for I had been quite low-spirited! Berwick has grown quite uninteresting to me for once in its life, and everybody is distressingly grown-up and I have 'nobody to play with.' I have been writing some children's stories for the 'Independent,' and the state of my mind is shadowed forth in the last one, 'Half-done Polly,' which is severely moral. I dare say you will not be able to account for my telling you this, but I suppose it is another illustration of your 'pleasures of autobiography so dear to all of us' — I don't know if I have quoted it right, but it made a great impression upon me. I once went over part of the 'Wedding Journeyin'' route myself and I have enjoyed that part particularly. I have grown very ambitious of late and wonder continually if by any possibility I shall write so charmingly by and by. I am diverting myself at present by read-

ing Froude's History, but I find myself planning my 'fall campaigns' in the midst of important acts of Parliament and it goes off slowly!

Yours most sincerely

SARAH O. JEWETT

SOUTH BERWICK, 17*th Oct.*, 1871

Life was becoming much more complicated. As she gave herself more and more to her friends she grew dependent on them, and suddenly found Berwick lonely. A flood of new problems presented themselves, and she was forever getting tangled up in her emotions, and then bursting out of the house, and riding too fast for good manners, and then having to try all over again not to let her boyishness make her rude and unladylike. She was fortunate in having met old Professor Theophilus Parsons one August day at Wells, and having developed an instant fondness for him. He was Professor of Law at Harvard, and an ardent Swedenborgian, the leader of the New Church. The kindly sureness of his faith both steadied and refreshed her. She sent him letters, endless pages long, telling him every-

thing that came into her head, and then writing at the close that he needn't be afraid, for she didn't always expect an answer. She told him again and again how much his books were helping her to find the meaning of life; that she had been out in the woods hunting for cardinal flowers; that she was studying Chambers' Cyclopedia with diligence and having music lessons and German lessons, but was pretty sure that it was better not to neglect some other things for the sake of her studies, since she learnt fastest by observation and never would be much of a student of books; how she had been ignominiously run over on Broadway on a visit to New York, and just escaped being killed; how she had been contented in her outdoor childhood and was almost sure she could live the same life now, although she wasn't sure she would find quite the infinite satisfaction she used in damming brooks; how she was beginning to feel very grand for she had been advertised among the 'crack contributors' to the 'Independent'; how she wished there was just one girl in Berwick she might have for a friend.

Since that bold prank of Alice Eliot's,

writing stories was not quite the same droll game it had been, and it seemed to confuse all the rest of life besides. Some time after she had had a second story, 'The Shore House,' accepted by the 'Atlantic,' in the fourth year after 'Mr. Bruce,' she was saying to Professor Parsons: 'I amused Mary very much this morning while we were driving together by saying a certain apple tree in a field was just like me. It hadn't been pruned and was a wilderness of "suckers" and unprofitable little scraggly branches. I said: "I wish I grew in three or four smooth useful branches instead of starting out here, there and everywhere, and doing nothing of any account at any point." I seem to have so many irons in the fire and I grow worried when I think of it. I must ask you about this when I see you. It's hard for me to know what to do: I don't like to shut myself up half of every day and say nobody must interfere with me, when there are dozens of things I might do. I have nothing to do with the house-keeping or anything of that kind, but there are bits of work waiting all the time that use up my days. I hate not to do them and I'm afraid of being selfish and

shirking — and yet — well, I'll not talk any more about that, but let it wait.'

There were so many things she wanted to talk over with every one that she started pouring out some of them in the middle of what she had meant to be a short business note to Mr. Scudder about copyrights. Her remarks were not quite in the breezy tone of the author of 'The Shipwrecked Buttons.' She said: 'I have been writing for the "Independent" since I saw you. Not very much, however, for I don't think I need the practice of writing so much as I need study, and care in other ways. I think you advised me long ago not to write too much, or to grow careless? I am getting quite ambitious and really feel that writing is my work — my business, perhaps; and it is so much better than making a mere amusement of it as I used. I sent you some sketches I gave a paper published at our Hospital Fair in Portland not long ago. I am really trying to be very much in earnest and to do the best I can, and I know you will wish me good luck. I have had nothing to complain of, for the editors have never proved to be dragons, and I even find I have achieved a small

reputation already. I am glad to have something to do in the world and something which may prove very helpful and useful if I care to make it so, which I certainly do. But I am disposed to longwindedness!' — and she finished her question about copyrights.

But it did no good to try to dam her tumbling thoughts with a jest like that. Ten days later she was writing again:

South Berwick
13 *July*, 1873

My dear Mr. Scudder:

In the first place I think this letter will need no answer. Does not this announcement help you to begin to read it with a pleasanter feeling? The truth is I wish to talk to you a little about my writing. I am more than glad to have you criticize me. I know I must need it very much and I realize the disadvantages of never hearing anything about my stories except from my friends, who do not write themselves, and are not unexceptionable authorities upon any strictly literary question. I do know several literary people quite well, but whenever they read anything of mine I know that they look down from their pinnacles in a

benignant way, and think it is very well done 'for her,' as the country people say. And all this is not what I want.

Then it is a disadvantage that I have been so successful in getting my nonsense printed! I am so glad to have you show me where I fail, for I wish to gain as fast as possible and I must know definitely what to do. But Mr. Scudder, I think my chief fault is my being too young and knowing so little! Those sketches I sent you were carefully written. Of course they were experiments and I could perhaps have made them better if they could have been longer. Those first stories of mine were written with as little thought and care as one could possibly give to write them at all. Lately I have chosen my words and revised as well as I know how: though I always write impulsively — very fast and without much plan.

And strange to say this same fault shows itself in my painting, for the more I worked over pictures the stiffer and more hopeless they grew. I have one or two little marine views I scratched off to use up paint and they are bright and real and have an individuality

— just as the 'Cannon Dresses' did. That is the dearest and best thing I ever have written. 'The Shore House' which Mr. Howells has, reminds me of it and comes next. I wrote it in the same way and I think it has the same reality. I believe the only thing he found fault with was that I did not make more of it. 'The characters were good enough for me to say a good deal more of them.' But I don't believe I could write a long story as he suggested, and you advise me in this last letter. In the first place I have no dramatic talent. The story would have no plot. I should have to fill it out with descriptions of character and meditations. It seems to me I can furnish the theatre, and show you the actors, and the scenery, and the audience, but there never is any play! I could write you entertaining letters perhaps from some desirable house where I was in most charming company, but I couldn't make a story about it. I seem to get very much bewildered when I try to make these come in for secondary parts. And what shall be done with such a girl? For I wish to keep on writing, and to do the very best I can. It is rather discouraging to find I lose my best

manner by studying hard and growing older and wiser. Copying one's self has usually proved disastrous. Shall not I let myself alone and not try definitely for this trick of speech or that, and hope that I shall grow into a sufficient respectability as the years go on?

I do not know how much real talent I have as yet, how much there is in me to be relied upon as original and effective in writing. I am certain I could not write one of the usual magazine stories. If the editors will take the sketchy kind and people like to read them, is not it as well to do that and do it successfully as to make hopeless efforts to achieve something in another line which runs much higher? You know the spirit in which I say this, for you know my writing has until very lately been done merely for the pleasure of it. It is not a bread and butter affair with me, though such a spendthrift as I could not fail to be glad of money, which has in most instances been lightly earned. I don't wish to ignore such a great gift as this God has given me. I have not the slightest conceit on account of it. Indeed I believe it frightens me more than it pleases me.

Now it has been a great satisfaction to have

said all this to you. Please look upon it as a slight tribute to your critical merits which no one can appreciate more heartily than I, and remember that I told you in the beginning there would be no questions which would need answering. Thank you for telling me of your engagement though I had heard of it long ago from some Boston friend and I had half a mind to speak of it when I was writing you. I am very glad now to send you my best wishes. I shall like exceedingly to see Miss Owen, and I congratulate you both with all my heart.

Yours most sincerely

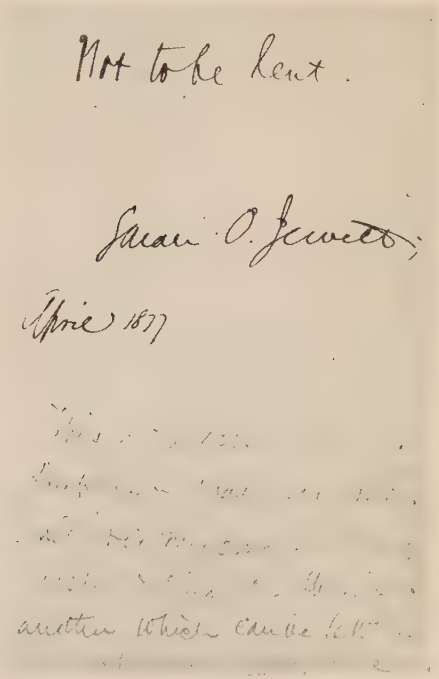
SARAH O. JEWETT

'The Shore House' was a very different story from 'Mr. Bruce.' Instead of making her effect depend upon the complications arising from a schoolgirl's prank, she wrote a straightforward account of a spacious country house like her own, of the memories of voices and laughter that had sounded through its halls, of the bustling village life that surrounded it. Mr. Howells, who had now succeeded Mr. Fields as editor of the 'Atlantic,' was unstinted in his praise. He detected a note

of authority in its quiet lines, and urged her to do more, for he thought that she had found her true bent in realism of just this sort. Miss Jewett thought so too. Other aspects of life in the village she had called Deephaven were already flickering in her mind. There was Mis' Kew the wife of the lighthouse keeper, and Mis' Dockum and the Widow Jim; and the gaunt captains, and she would like to write about a day of cunner-fishing, and the circus over at Denby, and Black Rock and the long sands where a ship had been driven ashore in the night, and the cliffs and pebble beach, and the subtle variance of wind and tide, of sun and shadow, that made each day in her Shore House different from every other.

She was almost startled to discover how swiftly this seed unfolded in her mind. All the things she had loved in childhood, all the facts of life she had observed, now seemed to fuse and recombine in this village of her fancy. Deephaven. She could see it shining plain. It was not a bleak place. The dwindling countryside was never bleak to her. She knew its sorrows and suffering, who better than the daughter of the country doctor? But to her

THE ENVELOPE THAT BROUGHT FROM W. D. HOWELLS THE ACCEPTANCE OF MISS JEWETT'S FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO THE ATLANTIC



WRITTEN ON A FLY-LEAF

eyes these were also bathed in a delicate radiance that seemed to emanate from the soil itself. 'Being a New Englander,' she once wrote as the opening sentence of one of her sketches, 'it is natural that I should first speak about the weather.' When she surveyed her world at the end of a long winter, the drab hills with their sodden snowdrifts and patches of heavy mud did not weigh on her with a sense of weariness or frustration, for she thought they looked 'like big leopards and tigers ready for a pounce at something, with their brown and white spots.' They were not dead and oppressive, but alive, alive as the first hepaticas who always struck her like some people she knew, 'very dismal blue, with cold hands and faces.' She was aware now, as she commenced to fill in the outlines of Deephaven, of how many things in nature stood as symbols to her mind. The roses blooming at the farm doors — she could not look at them without reflecting on the countless lovers who had picked them on Sunday evenings, and carried them along the roads or by the pasture footpaths, hiding them clumsily under their Sunday coats if they heard any one coming.

And in this land where the sea nipped many a life before its prime, how often the white roses had been put into paler hands and had withered there. . . . November, which was called by others a dreary and foreboding month, thrilled her by its swift changes of storm and sunlight. After a period of piercing and sombre cold a day would break almost sultry. The air was soft and damp and Sarah could see that the buds of the willows had even been beguiled into swelling a little, so that there was a fragile bloom over them, and the grass looked as if it had been growing green of late instead of fading steadily. It seemed like a reprieve from the doom of winter. Its sudden beauty made her catch her breath.

Now, as she tried to set down her impressions of the people as accurately as possible, she realized for the first time the full importance of her father's influence. Again and again the sound of his voice came to her as she bent over her paper, quietly explaining some detail that had fascinated him in their surroundings. She grew to believe that he had recognized long before herself in what direction the current of purpose in her life was

setting. She found herself equipped at the start of her career with what many strive unsuccessfully ever to gain, an almost complete knowledge of her environment. As her letters to Horace Scudder revealed, she was groping for the exact angle from which to express herself. Being a New Englander, she was naturally confused at the start by the differing claims of art and ethics. She had written many schoolgirlish paragraphs to Professor Parsons about wanting to be good and true so that the self in her stories would be sympathetic, and so that they would never fail to be helpful and strong because there was no life running through them, and her own heart cold and selfish. She had grown beyond that point now, and although, in her letters to him, she was still puzzling over the place that 'moralizing' should occupy in her work and hoping that Deephaven might 'help people to look at "commonplace" lives from the inside instead of the outside, to see that there is so deep and true a sentiment and loyalty and tenderness and courtesy and patience where at first sight there is only roughness and coarseness and something to be ridiculed,' at least

she could say: 'For myself, I like best to have the moral in the story — to make the *character* as apparent as I can, as one feels instinctively the character of the people one meets. I always feel when I say anything directly as if it were awkward and that if the story itself doesn't say it, it is no use to put it in afterward.' Clumsily expressed perhaps, and far from fully formulated, but Sarah Jewett had cleared the first barrier that blocks the way of nearly every American artist. She was not going to write moral tales. She was going to write — not about life, but life itself.

Her material was deeply embedded in her heart. She had simply to allow her recollections to rise slowly to consciousness and unfold, like a moonflower in the quiet evening. Those endless talks with Miss Polly Marsh, and with Captain Dan over at Wells. . . . That story about the man hitting his wife in the head with the stone bottle, for instance. . . . The crusty talk of the fishermen was so familiar to her ears that she could reconstruct its nasal cadence almost at will. But her way of composing was not calculated and deliberate like this. She had said that she always wrote

impulsively, and in a sense she was still the girl who scribbled down sudden stories out of what she knew. After the whole series of Deephaven sketches had appeared, she wrote to Horace Scudder: 'No. I haven't dug a clam all summer, for what with the Centennial and a visit in New York in June and the house filled with visitors ever since we came home in July, I have only been down to the shore half a dozen times and only for the day, which doesn't count with me. But I am going down directly to spend a week, and then I know where to go for those clams and where to get an old dory with as many leaks as a basket. And I know where the cunners hold county conferences out in the harbour — where two other little boys and I caught a hundred and thirty in just no time at all one day last summer. This is all in York, which reminds me of my dear Deephaven, though that was "made up" before I had ever stayed overnight in York, or knew and loved it as I do now. Since the Shore House was written I have identified Deephaven with it more and more. Still I don't like to have people say that I mean York when I say Deephaven.' It was out of

such expeditions as the one she was anticipating here that Deephaven grew, springing as naturally as bayberry and everlasting from her Maine soil.

The sketches were a real success. The very first one had called forth favorable comment from the New York 'Nation,' which, under the editorship of E. L. Godkin, was the one significant critical journal of the time. After they had been printed in the 'Atlantic' over a period of two or three years, Mr. Howells kept urging her to gather them together into a book. That meant a great deal of rewriting and rearranging, work that left her very tired since she was not used to it, and which strung out for nearly a year as she had several spells of sickness and was laid up for almost half the time. Then came the venture of interviewing publishers, and both Roberts Brothers, to whom she was introduced by Professor Parsons, and Mr. Osgood, to whom she had a letter from Mr. Howells, were so very kind that she was almost distressed in making up her mind between them. She finally decided on the latter, since the 'Atlantic' was after all the mainsail of her craft, and Mr. Howells had

been so thoughtful and taken so much trouble for her. In lean months of further revising and proof-reading the book grew duller by the hour to her tired eyes. At last she tossed it into her valise and took it to Boston herself in the beginning of the winter of 1877. She had planned to stop and pay some visits and have a gay time, but she had overworked and went home tired and aching after a few days.

'Deephaven' came out in the spring between pleasant tan covers adorned with a bunch of cat-tails, and bore the inscription, 'I dedicate this story of out-of-door life and country people first to my father and mother, my two best friends, and also to all my other friends, whose names I say to myself lovingly, though I do not write them here.' It sold well and brought her generous compliments from every one, and even gained a good deal of attention quite outside of the Boston circle. A happy smile came to her lips when an old country friend of her father's spoke of how the doctor's stimulating and encouraging presence always flooded the darkest sick-rooms with light, and then added, 'You are doing the

same good work in the same way, with a vastly enlarged sphere of "practice." As one of your grateful patients I send you my hearty thanks.' But the praise she treasured most was contained in a letter she opened one morning in the middle of the summer:

DEAR FRIEND:

I must thank thee for thy admirable book 'Deephaven.' I have given several copies to friends, all of whom appreciate it highly, and I have just been reading it over for the *third* time. I know of nothing better in our literature of the kind, though it recalls Miss Mitford's 'Our Village' and 'The Chronicles of Carlingford.' I heartily congratulate thee on thy complete success and am

Very truly thy friend
JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Mr. Whittier! She had enjoyed what he had written so much ever since she was a child that she was overcome to know that anything she was able to do could please him! She grew more and more astonished as further compliments poured in upon her, and was pleased —

THE AUTHOR OF 'DEEPHAVEN'

in a way — and yet she confessed to Professor Parsons that she found it very hard to realize that all this praise belonged to her, and it all seemed very vague when she tried to take it in. She was almost a little sorrowful when she thought how she used to build castles in Spain about this very thing, and now that she found the castles in finer array than she had ever dreamed, she didn't seem to care so very much for them after all. She begged him not to think she was ungrateful, but the pleasure somehow was such a different pleasure. . . . She was very used up and lazy all that summer and had strained her shoulder fairly badly swimming at Wells. But beneath every thought surged the warm glow that even if her book didn't half say the things she had tried, and didn't have any real 'finish,' at least she had made a beginning. She had done something of which her friends and family were proud. Next year . . .

In the next year she wrote hastily to Professor Parsons:

My dear father died suddenly yesterday at the mountains. It is an awful blow to me. I

know you will ask God to help me bear it. I don't know how I can live without him. It is so hard for us.

Yours lovingly

SARAH

III

DEAR MISS JEWETT: Don't be too proud, now your book has succeeded so splendidly, to send some stories and sketches to your old friend, the "Atlantic Monthly."' That had been Mr. Howells' jocular tribute to 'Deephaven.' At twenty-eight Sarah Jewett was considered an important asset to the journal which had established itself as the focal point in American literature. It is difficult to-day perhaps to realize the full height of this distinction. But one look at the neighbors that 'Mr. Bruce' and 'The Shore House' found in the magazine reveals how fully the early 'Atlantic' had achieved its purpose. Miss Jewett's first story was printed in the lean years following the Civil War. Thoreau and Hawthorne had just died. Emerson had written his 'Terminus' in 1867. The other poetic talents which had been enlisted at the magazine's foundation in the previous decade now seemed exhausted, and had turned to translation. Longfellow, Norton, and T. W. Parsons were all occupied with their versions

of Dante during the half-dozen years after the war, and Bayard Taylor's 'Faust' appeared, as did also Cranch's 'Virgil' and Bryant's 'Homer.' Consequently the 'Atlantic' could show nothing more than stories by John Hay and Edward Everett Hale, a poem by Taylor, and Howells' reviews of the elder Henry James' 'Secret of Swedenborg,' Mark Twain's 'Innocents Abroad,' and Whittier's 'Ballads of New England.'

But four years later it was once more in full swing, and 'The Shore House' was accompanied, among others, by Longfellow's 'Rhyme of Sir Christopher,' Holmes' Phi Beta Kappa 'Poem Served to Order,' a lyric by Aldrich, N. S. Shaler's 'Summer Journey of a Naturalist,' and a substantial chronicle of 'Contemporary European Art.' Even this list, however, does not begin to convey what an event the appearance of an 'Atlantic' could be. The issue of May, 1875, which contained Sarah Jewett's third accepted contribution, her poem 'Together,' shows the 'Atlantic' at its typical best. Marshalled together there were Longfellow's 'Amalfi,' Chapter V of 'Roderick Hudson' by H.

James, Jr., poems by Lowell and Aldrich, an essay by Howells, the fifth section of Mark Twain's 'Old Times on the Mississippi,' Whittier's 'Lexington,' and Celia Thaxter's account of the Memorable Murder at Smutty Nose.

It was in no sense sectional. It attracted to itself a good share of that new realism of 'local color' which was the chief contribution of the seventies to American literature. It not only furnished a cradle for the early efforts of Howells and James, but explored the Mississippi with Mark Twain, and when 'The Luck of Roaring Camp' swept the country in the then almost unheard of 'Overland Monthly,' James T. Fields immediately wrote Bret Harte a flattering request for further stories like it. Other regions of the country were finding their recorders, and although the recently founded 'Scribner's' introduced in 1873 'Sieur George,' the first of Cable's pictures of old creole days in New Orleans, and Page's 'Marse Chan' a decade later, still the 'Atlantic' brought the Tennessee mountains to general attention with Craddock's 'The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove' in 1878. In fact

the 'Atlantic' in its young prime seemed to be aware of the value of every one, except the two greatest. Walt Whitman had contributed two poems in its opening decade, but you look in vain for any mention of him during Howells' editorship, while Aldrich thought him little better than a charlatan. Herman Melville, disheartened by his apathetic country, had long since disappeared in the gloomy silence that engulfed his last thirty years.

Sarah Jewett, drawing pictures of what she knew, discovered that people in California and Virginia were doing a similar thing, and that their efforts were springing at once into widespread popularity. America seemed with the expansion of its lands to be suddenly aware of its sectional differences, and eager to taste the distinctive flavor of each. The protecting fences might all be broken down by the onrushing crowd, but before their feet had trampled every region to a level of standardization a few writers caught the essence of the old provincial charm.

Miss Jewett thus found her niche virtually carved for her. All she had to do was to step

gracefully into it. Boston certainly raised no question about considering her a fully arrived celebrity after the appearance of 'Deephaven,' for she was among the distinguished guests invited to Oliver Wendell Holmes' seventieth birthday party. And fortunately the impression did not stop with Boston. John Burroughs, who had already produced his early appreciation of Walt Whitman and followed it with 'Wake-Robin' and others in his long series of nature studies, had met her at that party and wrote to her a few years later:

'My dear Miss Jewett: I was glad to see your signature at the end of a letter expressing appreciation of my books. I know you are a genuine country woman, and when you take a bite of a book that treats of country things, you know quick enough whether the flavor be true or false. I remember your face at the Holmes breakfast, where I saw so many faces that I have forgotten. . . . I remember also your first sketches in the "Atlantic" and the clear human impression which they made upon me — an impression which your later works deepen and fill out. I should not have allowed you to get ahead of me in the matter of thanks:

my thanks are due to you also, and my good wishes for your future are from the heart. Now I know you are from Maine I can taste the flavor of the birch in your books. May the birches be kind to you.'

That was the real thing. The country woman, no matter how fully Boston took her to its heart, never wanted to be anything else. Her stories caught the flavor not only of the birches, but of the salt marshes, the roadside chicory and Queen Anne's lace. But there was nothing untutored about her. She might tell Horace Scudder that she had never studied in her life, but the books that lined the mellow shelves of her library had bestowed upon her a culture as rich and spacious as her house itself. She was forever reading 'Vanity Fair' and declaring it 'a very great book, and for its time Tolstoy and Zola and Daudet and Howells and Mark Twain and Turgenieff and Miss Thackeray of *this* day all rolled into one, so wise and great it is and reproachful and realistic and full of splendid scorn for meanness and wickedness, which scorn the Zola school seems to lack.' Her enthusiasms were finely catholic. She loved the seventeenth century,

and read Donne and Vaughan and Sir Thomas Browne with the greatest delight. She had an affection for Dr. Johnson, and once wrote a poem about Emerson. Dana's 'Two Years Before the Mast' called out her repeated admiration, and she said that it seemed as much a classic as anything America had to give. She saw one day a set of Voltaire included in an auction, and was tempted to bid, but didn't quite dare propose to her mother the bringing in of ninety-seven new volumes at one fell swoop. She declared to Mrs. Fields that there was no more charming book in the world than Dorothy Wordsworth's 'Tour in Scotland,' and added, 'It is just our book, and the way we enjoy things, isn't it, when we are footing it out of doors?'

What she read now often threw flashes of light on the problem of her own writing. When she picked up 'The Pearl of Orr's Island' for the first time in years, the beginning struck her as just as clear and strong as the day she had read it as a child. She would never forget the reality of delight she had found in its pungent flavor. But now she reflected, 'Alas, that she couldn't finish it in the same noble key of

simplicity and harmony; but a poor writer is at the mercy of much unconscious opposition. You must throw everything and everybody aside at times, but a woman made like Mrs. Stowe cannot bring herself to that cold selfishness of the moment for one's work's sake, and the recompense for her loss is a divine touch here and there in an incomplete piece of work.'

At first she had been only half-hearted about 'Anna Karénina,' but suddenly something in Tolstoy's short stories caught her, some indefinable kinship of spirit that kept her awake until almost morning, made her drowse in church and write hurriedly afterwards: 'I never felt the soul of Tolstoy's work until last night . . . but now I know what he means, and I know that I can dare to keep at the work I sometimes have despaired about because you see people are always caught by fringes of it, and liked the stories if they liked them at all for some secondary quality. I know there is something true, and yet I myself have often looked only at the accidental and temporary part of them.'

Perhaps the greatest single spur to her work

was Flaubert. She believed that he alone was sufficient refutation to the people who objected to the new realism because it dwelt on commonplaces and trivialities. For he gave every detail weight, and made her feel that the woes of Hamlet did not absorb her thoughts any more than 'the silly wavering gait of Madame Bovary,' who was 'uninteresting, ill-bred, and without any of the attraction of rural surroundings.' She herself sought a kindred skill in writing about the simple country people. From the day she discovered them she kept a slip of paper pinned on her secretary in the upper hall, inscribed with two of Flaubert's sentences: 'Écrire la vie ordinaire comme on écrit l'histoire,' and, 'C'est ne pas de faire rire, ni de faire pleurer, ni de vous mettre à fureur, mais d'agir à la façon de la nature, c'est à dire de faire rêver.' There they remained, behind the small copy of the Raeburn portrait of Scott and the engraving of Michel de Montaigne and the Venetian lion, behind the pen tray and the silver candlesticks in which the candles were usually burnt low; and they caught her eye whenever she sat down to write.

As she recovered her emotional balance

after her first deep sadness, she wrote again to Professor Parsons: 'I think that was the reason people liked "Deephaven" — it was a book written by a girl, which is perhaps a rarer thing than seems possible at first thought. I am beginning to like it myself in a curious sort of way, for I am not the one who wrote it any longer and in this last year since my father's death, though I have learned many new things, I have outgrown a good deal else.' She published her children's stories as a book, and put into a volume called 'Old Friends and New' some new sketches she had been doing, along with 'Mr. Bruce' and other old ones that had not fitted into 'Deephaven.' Two years later she had another collection ready and wrote the dedication:

To
T. H. J.

My dear father; my dear friend;
The best and wisest man I ever knew;
Who taught me many lessons and showed me many things
As we went together along the
Country-By-Ways.

But she had not been at all well. The doctor

forbade her any reading or writing for a whole winter, and when she could work, she often felt an empty lack of satisfaction in the results.

She was fortunate in having her close intimacy with Mrs. Fields ripen about this time. James T. Fields, the most notable publisher and editor in America, died in 1881. He had married in early middle life the beautiful Annie Adams, not yet twenty, and had taken his bride on a long trip abroad. They had visited the Tennysons, and stayed some time with the Brownings at Florence, and young Mrs. Fields had had the even more remarkable experience of meeting Leigh Hunt the month before his death, and hearing the very words of a conversation of Shelley's. She wrote thrilled accounts of all these things into her journals, those rich stores that were to yield, after her husband's death, her volumes of reminiscence, 'Authors and Friends,' and 'A Shelf of Old Books.' Under the sway of this keen, vigorous publisher and his exquisite wife their decorous Georgian house at 148 Charles Street was from the start 'addicted to every hospitality and every benevolence,' as Henry James said, 'addicted to the cultiva-

tion of talk and wit and to the ingenious multiplication of such ties as could link the upper half of the title page with the lower.' It became the natural meeting place for every one of literary and dramatic distinction on both sides of the water, and an abundant treasury of associations. It was the nearest approach ever made to an American salon.

You entered the reception room with its dark blue velvet furnishings and gray rug. You noticed that it was filled with flowers and that every patch of wall was hung with paintings, and beyond you caught a glimpse of the dining-room, the windows of which were latticed with ivy and looked on a long shady garden running down to the river. But you did not linger here. You passed upstairs to the drawing-room which ran the whole length of the house, with side alcoves at either end. It was a temple of busts and autographs. Your hostess was always showing you something new: a charcoal sketch of William Hunt's, a portrait of Pope painted by Reynolds' master, a volume of Pope that had been owned by Lincoln, a rare Blake, a boyish portrait of Dickens. The greater part of the walls were

lined with books to the ceiling. The moss-green carpet and draperies gave a subdued and restful coloring. You sat there and watched the sun set over a gold stretch of water, where the river widened toward the sea.

Left suddenly alone in the middle of her life, Mrs. Fields' intensely personal nature demanded companionship. Even before the publisher's death Sarah Jewett had begun to be a more frequent visitor in Charles Street, and now impalpably — Mrs. Fields was fifteen years older than Sarah — the two women were absorbed into a union that endured as long as their lives. Miss Jewett fitted into this new environment with quiet ease, and shared in the wealth it had to give. There were occasional gay breakfasts with the Autocrat who lived only a few doors down the street, and more with the Thomas Bailey Aldriches, who were near by on Beacon Hill. She recalled the flutter of her pulses when Lowell had read his goldfish poem, and promised Annie Fields and her the manuscript. She could always hear the sound of Matthew Arnold's voice as he had sat by the fire one night reading them 'The Scholar Gypsy.'

Sarah Jewett had developed into a beautiful woman. She might gaily say that she had gained the nickname Pinny 'because she was so straight and thin and her head no bigger than a pin's,' but on meeting her you were struck with the slender dignity of her bearing, and her friends spoke of her sparkling charm and piquant grace. You were first impressed with her delicate refinement, and then warmed by her cordial simplicity. One day Mr. Whittier asked her: 'Sarah, was thee ever in love?' She answered, with a rush of color, 'No! Whatever made you think that?' And Mr. Whittier said, 'No, I thought not'; and again she laughingly explained that she had more need of a wife than a husband. She dealt with this matter in the 'Country Doctor' where Dr. Leslie remarked of his adopted daughter: 'You may think that it is too early to decide, but I see plainly that Nan is not the sort of girl who will be likely to marry. Nan's feeling toward her boy-playmates is exactly the same as toward the girls she knows. You have only to look at the rest of the children together to see the difference; and if I make sure by and by, the law of her nature is that

she must live alone and work alone, I shall help her to keep it instead of break it, by providing something else than the business of housekeeping and what is called a woman's natural work, for her activity and capacity to spend itself upon.'

Miss Jewett had found long since the work on which she wanted to center her life. If she thought of marriage at all, it was as a hindrance and complication that would step between her and her dreams. But the generous warmth of her nature demanded an outlet, and she found herself sustained in her devotion to Annie Fields. They were together constantly in Boston, or in Mrs. Fields' summer home at Manchester-by-the-Sea, and when they were separated, daily letters sped between them, hardly letters, but jotted notes of love, plans of what they would do when they met, things they wanted to talk about, books they would read together. In the year after Mr. Fields' death they left for a long tour of Europe, and Whittier wished them *bon voyage* in his sonnet, 'Godspeed.' They ranged from Norway to Rome, and called on every one. They stayed with the Arnolds, they saw

Christina Rossetti, and explored the romantic coast of Cornwall. But by far the most impressive event for Sarah was the visit they paid to Tennyson. She was completely the child of her century. She recorded: 'No two men I have ever seen came up to Grant and Tennyson in GREATNESS. Tennyson, first, I must say that.' How grateful she was to Annie Fields for such a privilege.

This new relationship meant a far more elaborate life. She had scribbled blithely to Mr. Aldrich even before the trip abroad: 'I was only at home overnight to get a bigger trunk and some more clothes, and tell my family I was still very much attached to them.' She was growing more and more fond of T. B. A., who had now followed Mr. Howells as editor of the 'Atlantic' and had said that whenever she sent him one of her perfect stories, the whole number seemed in bloom. She was deeply moved by his poetry, and told him later that his suggestive criticism of her work had taught her more than she could say, and had helped her to keep toward a better direction than she could have found for herself. Her letters to him form one of the

friendliest passages in her correspondence. She had the perfect way of phrasing a social thing, as when she said to him: 'I have been waiting from week to week to find the right time to ask you all to South Berwick, for it has been wet and dreary, and I did not want to deepen your impression of banging blinds.'

Most of her letters were written from Berwick, for to Berwick she always returned. She once declared that she never felt prouder or had more the sense of owning and being owned than when some old resident near the village met her and said, 'You're one of the Doctor's girls, ain't ye?' She bore this out when she wrote to T. B. A. She had borrowed his copy of Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine,' and mislaid it, and in pulling over all the books in the house, many of which she had not seen for ages, she made some rewarding discoveries: 'Father had a great quantity of paper-covered literature of a most professional sort, and these he never gave away, so they have been collecting dust diligently and needed overhauling. I felt some times as if I were Nan in the "Country Doctor," but usually like my own self who was being constantly reminded of very dear

old days when I used to drive about with Father over the hills and down the river roads. I suppose some of these old French and English books would make any doctor happy, but I find so many notes and so many traces of their best reader that I mean to keep all that are left. Father was always giving his books away and lending them and never getting them back while he was here, so there aren't enough to be any trouble now, even if one never looked at them.' And Sarah did look at them sometimes. She was frequently dipping into a Handbook of Anatomy, and becoming interested, and recalling how much of a doctor she was herself.

Once settled down at home again she often found that her head was buzzing full of stories, so her only fear was that there would not be enough winter to write them in. And their flavor filtered into her letters. 'I am going to drive the minister to a Conference up in the country one day this week,' she wrote to Aldrich, 'and I am looking forward to a great deal of pleasure. Wish me good weather, and wish you were there to see the country ministers and to hear the old ladies sing Dundee and

THE JEWETT HOUSE AT SOUTH BERWICK

St. Martin's and the rest of the psalm tunes.' Or again she was telling him that she was having a dear time at home for more than one reason: 'There is an elderly cousin of my mother's here who is one of the few persons left to come and make a long old fashioned visit. We have always been fond of having her ever since we were children, but every year it gives us more pleasure to see her little three-cornered caps with their plaited strings and her small shoulder shawls. She used to live in Portsmouth and remembers T. B. "most clear."'

Home-coming was a real ceremony after that longest absence in Europe, and she sat down the next morning to say to Mrs. Fields, 'Here I am at the desk again, all as natural as can be and writing a first letter to you with so much love, and remembering that this is the first morning in more than seven months that I haven't waked up to hear your dear voice and see your dear face. I do miss it very much, but I look forward to no long separation, which is a comfort. It was lovely in the old house and I did so wish you had come down, too, it was all so sweet and full of welcome, and Hannah and Annie and John and Hilborn

and Lizzie Pray all in *such* a state because I had got home!'

One probably comes closest to her personality in these hasty notes to Annie Fields. She has been enjoying Rousseau's 'Confessions' snug and lazy by a big open fire. John suggests the furnace, being evidently tired of getting in enough big walnut logs for all the fireplaces every morning. But she begs off selfishly. The house never seems half so pleasant when the fireplaces are cold. . . . She has been down to Portsmouth and out to the Isles of Shoals to visit Celia Thaxter, her beloved 'Sandpiper,' and written a poem there. . . . She has been setting off firecrackers with the boys. . . . Or she has been travelling in her own land, and feels as if she had seen another country in Europe. — Oh a great deal better than that, though she only went wandering over a great tract of pasture-land down along the river. . . . She was taking a drive about town when she saw such a coast from way up the long hillside down to the tavern garden that she jumped out of the sleigh, and borrowed Stubby's sled. . . . She has been visiting some up-country patients of her father, and renewing

old times. . . . Or she begins, 'I have done so many things to-day that I should like to write them down and see what they were. There was a piece gone off the top of the three gilded feathers on the breakfast-room looking glass, so I carved a feather top out of pine wood and stuck it on and gilded it most satisfactorily, and then I set Stubby and an impoverished friend who needed money for the Fourth to digging plantains out of the grass at fifteen cents the hundred, whereupon they doubled their diligence until they got $1.65 out of me at dinner time! And I transplanted a lot of little sunflowers and put hellebore on the gooseberry bushes and wrote a lot of notes for the "Berwick Scholar" on account of the Centennial arrangements, and went down street twice and — but I won't tell you, yes I will — the little Beverly doggie came by express! and is ardently beloved by Stubs, and that took time, and after dinner I went to Beaver Dam with John about a carriage painter and another errand, and then I dressed me all up and went and made two elegant calls, and then I came home and wrote this.' . . . And thinking of the complications of life

in Boston she had said, 'You are like my monkey and the jack-in-the-box with your meetings. Some day you will get up a big one that will scare you to death.'

But those words from Flaubert had not been pinned on her secretary for nothing. She was no longer fumbling after the purpose of her work. She was becoming steadily more aware of the process through which a story evolved: 'You will be much amused to hear that the funny old man in the linen duster whom I caught sight of at Chapel Station has really been the making of the "Atlantic" sketch. I mean to begin him this morning and get well on with him before the girls come. His name proves to be Mr. Teaby, and he is one of those persons who peddle essences and perfumery and a household remedy or two, and foot it about the country with limp enameled cloth bags. What do you think of Mr. Teaby now? Teaby is the name, and he talks with sister Pinkham about personal and civic matters on a depot platform in the rural districts. Don't you think an editor would feel encouraged?' But while experience taught her that when a detail like this flipped into her mind, it would

slowly crystallize out into a compact whole, at the same time she grew to realize that it was not simply a case of writing down what she knew and remembered, but that something happened, over which she had no control; and she marvelled more and more at the inscrutable way in which the crystal formed. 'Good heavens!' she exclaimed to Mrs. Fields, 'What a wonderful kind of chemistry it is that evolves all the details of a story and writes them presently in one flash of time! For two weeks I have been noticing a certain string of things and having hints of character, etc., and day before yesterday the plan of the story comes into my mind, and in half an hour I have put all the little words and ways into their places and can read it off to myself like print. Who does it? For I grow more and more sure that I don't!'

Her work was slowly rippling into wider and wider recognition. 'The Nation' remarked, 'One has learned to look for Miss Jewett's best work in the pages of the "Atlantic,"' which meant that she was appearing besides in almost every other magazine of importance, and especially in 'Harper's' and the 'Century.'

These New York monthlies were quite impressive, for they had introduced artistic printing, and in their pages Miss Jewett's stories were adorned with elaborate illustrations. In 1883 she had dedicated to A. F. the fourth collection of her work, 'The Mate of the Daylight,' and had next tried her hand at two longer efforts, 'A Country Doctor' and 'A Marsh Island.' But the first time she far transcended 'Deephaven' was when she was thirty-seven, and offered another gathering, 'The White Heron,' to 'my dear sister Mary.' Once when she noticed how every one else seemed to be forging ahead, and growing more and more prolific, she had written gaily to Annie Fields: 'So is not S. O. J., whose French ancestry comes to the fore, and makes her nibble all round her stories like a mouse.'

And the title story of the new book reveals this deft elimination. It tells how Sylvia, a lonely farm child who has known no companions except among beasts and plants, meets a gallant and friendly hunter. He is primarily a collector of birds, and believes that the rare white herons have a nest near by. The girl's lonely heart goes out to this gracious romantic

stranger. Before daybreak, in pale moonlight, she wanders far into the woods to a great pine, the last of its generation. The birds are just awakening, and she believes that from the top of this vast tree she can see the white heron rise to the dawn, and so betray its nest. Up and up, clinging to the sharp twigs that scratch her thin fingers and leave them clumsy and stiff with pitch, the child makes her perilous ascent. From the top, triumphant, she sees the day break and the sea far to the east, a golden haze spread out over the world, the birds singing louder and louder in the black sombre forest far below. Then out of it rises, 'like a single, floating feather,' the white heron from his nest in the dead hemlock. But Sylvy keeps hidden this secret of the bird. She is truer to nature than to the potential lover she is dimly conscious of in the young hunter.

Not a word is wasted in creating this atmosphere of fragile poignancy. It is no surprise that it affected readers as various as Dr. Weir Mitchell and Ellen Terry, who both wrote Miss Jewett about it. And Mary E. Wilkins who had just printed her first book of New England stories, 'A Humble Romance,'

and had received from Miss Jewett an enthusiastic letter of appreciation, now answered: 'You are lovely to write me so about my stories, but I never wrote any story equal to your "White Heron." I don't think I ever read a short story, unless I except Tolstoy's "Two Deaths," that so appealed to me. I would not have given up that bird any more than you would if he had come back.'

And along with the growing sureness of her work, life in these years was always brimming fuller. She loved having her friends come to Berwick, for she felt that once they had spent the night under her roof, they never went away, which made an old house very different from a new one. The village always seemed a little sad, even to her, in the wane of winter. The houses looked at each other as if they said, 'Good heavens! the things we remember!' But after the leaves came out they appeared quite prepared for the best, and touchingly cheerful. Then, following an abundant spring of work, she and Mary sometimes harnessed Sheila, and started driving across country for Manchester, happily independent of the Eastern Railroad. At Mrs. Fields' she often

found Mrs. Pratt and Mrs. Bell in whose tongues sparkled the wit and spirit of their father Rufus Choate, and their gossip was as gay and malicious as that of gentle ladies could be.

She went to Amesbury to visit Mr. Whittier, to whom she had dedicated 'The King of Folly Island,' and he seemed so glad to see her, and they 'sat right down and went at it, and with pauses at tea-time the conversation was kept up until after ten.' Then there was that tea at the Players' Club in New York with Edwin Booth, and that later, grander tea at the exhibition of Sargent's portraits, where Mrs. Fields and she poured and thirteen hundred people crowded in. The newspapers reported it under the headline 'Tea More Popular Than Paintings,' and not only recounted that Mrs. Fields 'was in a black velvet gown relieved by a bit of exquisite lace and carried a bunch of fragrant violets,' and that Miss Jewett 'likewise was in black and wore a large, effective black hat with many nodding plumes'; but went on to regale their readers with such items as that when one gaunt countrywoman was asked by her niece to buy

a catalogue, she simply said in astonishment, 'What for?' and that when an attendant apologized to another woman for keeping her waiting so long for her cup, she had cheerfully answered: 'Oh, don't hurry, pray don't. I have always wanted to see dear Mrs. Fields near to, and isn't Miss Jewett a picture?'

But all her visits to town did not mean such frivolity. She prized as highly as any the days she spent at old Mrs. Cabot's. She would sit in her friend's room and talk and read, and the old lady would speak wisely from her great comfortable bed, and at night they took to backgammon. There was something about that house unlike any other, a sense of space and time and uninterruptedness. Miss Jewett revelled in its solitude, and scarcely took a step from the door during her entire stay. Sometimes she was suddenly drowned in story writing while she was there. And sometimes she found herself dreaming about the pink hollyhocks in the Berwick garden.

At length Mrs. Fields and she embarked on another voyage abroad. This was even more rewarding than the first. She went about the streets of Whitby with Mr. Du Maurier and

his absurd little fluffy dog that kept getting lost and having to be hunted up just as its master was talking most eagerly, or had started to sing one of the songs from 'Peter Ibbetson.' They made a special pilgrimage to the woods of Barbizon, since Miss Jewett had always been devoted to Millet's work. They saw Madame Blanc in Paris, Madame Blanc who had translated a book of Miss Jewett's stories into French and prefaced them with a long analysis, and was still to translate further stories which she persuaded Miss Jewett to contribute to the 'Revue des Deux Mondes.' The next month she was writing a long letter from London to her friend Mrs. Whitman, the painter, about how they had been seeing Mrs. Huxley and the Humphry Wards, and had spent eight solid hours in Parliament one night listening to a whole debate. But the point of the letter was this: she had been down to Aldworth again, and it meant far more to her even than it had before. As she went into Tennyson's presence she experienced the feeling of a former age. It was exactly the way she would have felt a thousand years before if she had been paying a friendly visit to her king.

The Laureate had recited some of his poetry in a wonderful way, and had been completely fascinated with the Japanese crystal she wore on the end of a chain about her neck, and had fingered it, and turned it over and over, and peered into it, and had asked her in his gruff voice if that was where she found her stories.

They travelled down through Southern France to Italy, and at Venice, in the midst of her delight in its gorgeous mosaics and slender campanile, she received a delight even more piercing: 'a good letter from Berwick this morning; new dog a treasure, but three of the horses with coughs — Dick and Betty and Susan! The distemper thought to be of no consequence by John until Dick caught it.' She wanted to go home.

The years went onward in this manner until her late nineteenth-century world began to break up. Lowell, Whittier, Holmes, Bishop Brooks, and Tennyson all died early in its final decade, Tennyson only a month or two after Miss Jewett had seen him. She felt each death keenly, for they had been firm pillars, inspiring her with their strength and standing

protectingly against uncertainty and chaos. Of Lowell she wrote to Mrs. Fields that she had been as fond of him, almost, as if she had belonged to his household and kindred. It was a rare pleasure to realize that perhaps the very last thing he had written was a letter to her London publisher: 'I am very glad to hear that Miss Jewett's delightful stories are to be reprinted in England. Nothing more pleasingly characteristic of rural life in New England has been written, and they have long been valued by the judicious here. They are probably idylls in prose and the life they commemorate is as simple in its main elements, if not so picturesque in its setting, as that which has survived for us in Theocritus.

'Miss Jewett has wisely chosen to work within narrow limitations, but these are such only as are implied in an artistic nature and a cheerful compliance with it. She has thus learned a discreet use of her material and to fill the space allotted without overcrowding it either with scenery or figures. Her work is narrow in compass, like that of the gem-cutter, but there is always room for artistic completeness and breadth of treatment which are what

she aims at and attains. She is lenient in landscape, a great merit, I think, in these days. Above all she is discreet in dialect, using it for flavor but not, as is the wont of many, so oppressively as to suggest garlic. She has a gift of quiet pathos and its correlative, equally subdued humor.

'I remember once, at a dinner of the Royal Academy, wishing there might be a toast in honor of the Little Masters such as Tenniel, Du Maurier, and their fellows. The tiny woodcuts traced by those who gave rise to the name attract an affectionate partiality which the spacious compositions of more famous contemporaries fail to win. They are artists in the best sense, who could make small means suffice for great ends. It is with them that I should class Miss Jewett, since she both possesses and practises this precious art.'

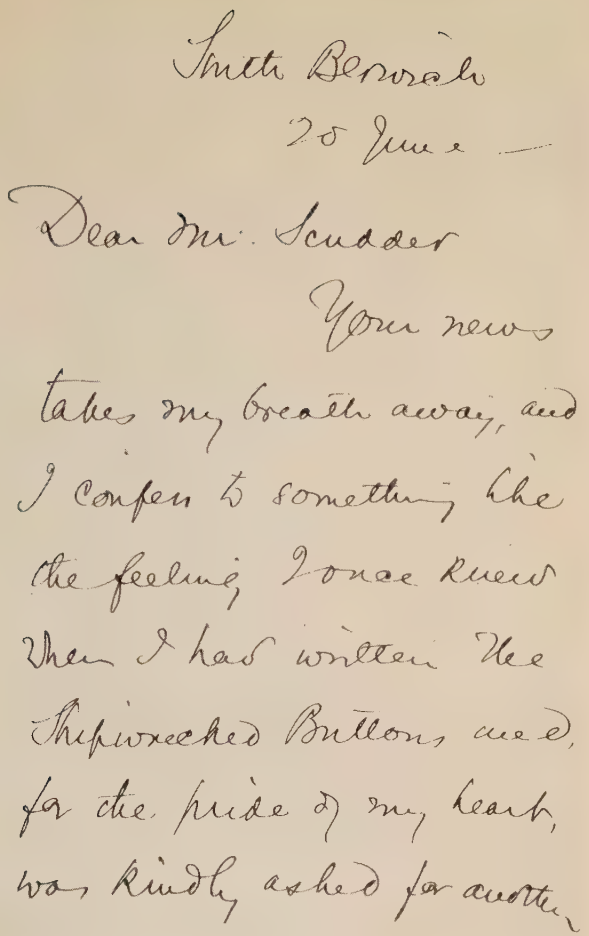
In her own closer circle, death had come to old Professor Parsons three years after her father was gone, and now to her mother following a weary illness which the bright autumn weather could not seem to help. At that time Sarah Jewett was reminded how tightly her life was bound to the village. One by one the

neighbors came to make their visits, and sit with her through the long sunny afternoons. One little woman almost ninety who rarely left her house, still mindful of the proprieties, stepped in to say: 'I know *just* how you feel, dear. I have been through the same sorrow.' And Sarah could see that it was present yet in her heart, and that she was missing her mother still.

Miss Jewett's health was failing again. She had a long spell of fever which left her eyes weak for over a year, and the very next winter she was down with pneumonia. She felt as though something was always keeping her from her work, and yet, as she looked at the long line of books on her shelf, it struck her that she must have been writing every minute since she was born. By 1895 four more had been added after 'The White Heron,' as well as two long children's stories and a brisk history of the Normans, which she had been asked to write as one volume in a series of 'Stories of the Nations,' and during the composition of which she had hurled frantic postcards of questions across the ocean to Edward Freeman. Then after Celia Thaxter's death,

she had prepared the Appledore edition of her poems as a labor of love.

Aldrich had been succeeded in the 'Atlantic' chair by Horace Scudder, but she was still writing him about her work. She appreciated at their full value the descriptions of Indiana and the Tennessee mountains and old Virginia. She recognized the authenticity of their 'local color,' and felt that their 'native dialect' must be exactly accurate. But she had grown to perceive their shortcomings as literature, and said enthusiastically to T. B. A. about one of his stories: '*There's* realism seen from the humorous point of view: the trouble with most realism is that it isn't seen from any point of view at all, and so its shadows fall in every direction and it fails of being art.' The point of view from which she saw her own characters and incidents was the same as that with which she confronted life: eagerly, surely, with the same droll archness and tender penetration. And she was not blind to the pitfalls that might lurk there, for she wrote in the same letter, 'The distinction between sentiment and sentimentality is a question of character, and is as deep as one can


South Berwick
25 June —

Dear Mr. Scudder

Your news
takes my breath away, and
I confess to something like
the feeling I once knew
when I had written the
Shipwrecked Bullion, and,
for the pride of my heart,
was kindly asked for another

FROM A LETTER TO MR. HORACE E. SCUDDER ON HIS SUCCEEDING THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH AS EDITOR OF THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY IN 1890

go in life, and kindness must have a sound taproot.'

She wrote to Aldrich about everything else besides. It was a real event when she found one of his books waiting for her in the mail:

'I do long to say when I see you in what reverence and admiration I hold your great gift and genius of verse. It shines like a star in this world of writers where people go running about with poor candles and lamps with pretty shades. . . . I read your poems a great deal and I never take them up without new admiration and a joy at thinking that there will be more to come, and that here is this most beautiful possession new and shining in my hand. . . . I wish that I could ever tell you what a constant pleasure it is to have you for my friend and playmate, or how grateful I am for all the help you have given me about my work, and that seeing how carefully you do your work is always one of my best lessons. I can't help thinking how pleased Lillian must be about this new book, and then I am pleased all over again.

'Yours affectionately,

'SADIE'

That was his name for her, and she called him the 'Duke of Ponkapog.'

She entered with feeling into every side of his life. When his mother died a few years after her own, she began:

'Dear friend, Your letter gives me the comfort of knowing that weakness and age are at an end forever for your dear mother and that her kind and gentle life is done as far as this world goes. Whatever change has come must be for the better since she herself put no hindrance in the way. All this I felt so little while ago when the same loss touched me that my heart is full of instant comprehension. I know how different this loss is from any other. As long as one's mother lives the sense of being lovingly protected never fails, and one is always a child.

'There is a strange sense of being alone in the world for the first time. When a larger life opens for those who are nearest and dearest it seems as if a larger life opened for us too. I sometimes remember what Sir Thomas Browne said — about joining both lives together and living in one but for the other. "For seeing there is something of us that must

still live on," he begins. I have not seen the page for a long time, but in such days the words come back. It makes a great change in one's life, but it is a change for the better. I never felt so near to my mother or kept such a sense of her love for me and mine for her as I have since she died. There are no bars of shyness or difference or inexpressiveness or carelessness; it seems as if I had never known my mother before. But it is no use to try to write these things. If I were with you, I should take hold of your hand and not say anything, and I do that now.'

Miss Jewett's latest book, 'The Life of Nancy,' had reaped a new harvest of tribute. Rudyard Kipling, who was now hauling dirt and spreading phosphate on his farm in Vermont, thought the best of the lot in its manner was 'The Guests of Mrs. Timms.' To his thinking Miss Jewett could be, when she saw fit, masculine enough to equip three average male story-tellers, and in this sharply humorous piece of characterization she gave proof of it. It was solid, firm-handed work that pleased him all over, and he declared that it

had been worth while spending three winters in New England to be able to draw the full flavor out of her stories. And Mr. Howells, whose 'Wedding Journey' had started her wondering almost twenty-five years ago whether she would ever be able to write so charmingly, now said: 'How you do make other people's joinery seem crude and clumsy! No, you are too friendly and kind for that, but it serves so, out of mere shame and a sense of its unworthiness.'

But of all the critical letters she ever received that which she folded and put away with the keenest satisfaction was one from Aldrich. His appraisal came so close to her own instinctive vision of what she had done. He admitted frankly that his own stories had no particular *raison d'être*, that they recorded nothing, but simply amused, if they did that. And that their humor was probably only the humor of a fashion. And with that he said: 'Every generation has its own story-tellers — and very few of them ever survive their generation. The two or three who do are authors who have painted some special phase of life in some indelible local color. I think that Mrs. Stowe

has done this in several of her Oldtown sketches ("Uncle Tom's Cabin" will live for other reasons), Miss Wilkins in her "Humble Romances," and you in at least a dozen pictures of New England country life. I believe, for example, that Hawthorne's pallid allegories will have faded away long before those two little Dulham ladies will give up their daring railway journey to the neighboring town, in search of innocent personal decorations.'

A dozen pictures were a very just winnowing from her many experiments and transient successes. She had been slowly feeling her way. She was aware now that 'Deephaven' had been written by a girl who had sat down to give a close transcription of her experience. It was a careful study, its details were correct, but it had not life. Observation was perhaps Sarah Jewett's greatest gift, but it was not enough. Take these closing lines from 'Deephaven' which are as fine as any in the book: 'I should like to walk along the beach at sunset, and watch the color of the marshes and the sea change as the light of the sky goes out. It would make the old days come back vividly. We should see the roofs and chimneys of the

village, and the great Chantrey elms look black against the sky. A little later the marsh fog would show faintly white, and we should feel it deliciously cold and wet against our hands and faces; when we looked up there would be a star; the crickets would chirp loudly; perhaps some late sea-birds would fly inland. Turning, we should see the lighthouse lamp shine out over the water, and the great sea would move and speak to us lazily in its idle, high-tide sleep.'

Now put beside them the opening passage from 'By the Morning Boat,' and you have an account of the whole distance the writer has gone: 'On the coast of Maine, where many green islands and salt inlets fringe the deep-cut shore line; where balsam firs and bayberry bushes send their fragrance far seaward, and song-sparrows sing all day, and the tide runs plashing in and out among the weedy ledges; where cowbells tinkle on the hills and herons stand in the shady coves — on the lonely coast of Maine stood a small gray house facing the morning light. All the weather-beaten houses of that region face the sea apprehensively, like the women who live in them.'

Sarah Jewett is no longer merely describing what she has seen. The facts are shimmering in her brain, and recurring in new shapes and combinations. It has taken twenty-five years, years not only of experimenting with words, but of charging them with the richness of an unfolding and ripening nature, before she can write a description that would not merely record the facts, but would enmesh the light and shadow, the shifting clouds and restless air. And now, at forty-seven, she is on the verge of an achievement that will carry her far beyond the scope of Mrs. Stowe, far even beyond that of Miss Wilkins.

IV

THE structure of 'The Country of the Pointed Firs' is practically that of 'Deephaven.' A visitor from the outside world spends the summer at Dunnet Landing, a remote fishing village in eastern Maine. She shares life with Almiry Todd, the famous herb-gatherer, renowned for the restoring powers of her thoroughwort elixir and spruce beer, with her shy brother William, and her mother Mis' Blackett, a spry little lady who carries eagerly her eighty-seven years. She becomes familiar with every sight and sound of the place, the pasture where the best penny-royal grows, the sails of all the weather-beaten lobster-smacks, the right wind to fetch a dory out to Green Island. She hears old Captain Elijah Tilley talk about his dead wife, and learns the tragedy of poor Joanna, whose solitary days dragged by on Shell-Heap. The great occasion of the whole summer is the trip up-country to the head of the bay for the Bowden Family Reunion. And with the first breath of fall she takes the south-bound boat,

and watches the scattered houses of Dunnet Landing merge once more into the rocks and firs.

The events are almost too simple to recount, for they are ordinary life in a Maine coast settlement of the last century, and through catching their essence Sarah Jewett has preserved for America a segment of its past. 'The Pointed Firs,' as a full-length book, carries greater weight than her single stories, but it is not a novel. For the conventional novel structure, as her two or three attempts had shown, she had no gift. But here, in these loosely connected sketches, she has achieved a structure independent of plot. Her scaffolding is simply the unity of her vision. And so the book seems to melt into the land itself, and its quality is caught in William James' remark that it possesses 'that incommunicable cleanness of the salt air when one first leaves town.' Its pages are as direct as the rays of the sun, and as fresh as a breeze across the water. They envelop the mingled charm and sadness of the countryside just as you feel it on the summer day that brings the first hint of autumn, when, in the midst of the wild roses

POINT PARK COLLEGE LIBRARY

along the dusty road, you are suddenly aware of the first fateful spray of goldenrod. And this is what Howells must have meant when he wrote her from Kittery on just such a day in early August: 'This is one of *your* days, as much as if you had made it — silvery, serene, with an edge, a delicate filigree, of frosting in the sunny air.'

This atmosphere does not emanate from 'Deephaven,' nor, indeed, from any story before 'The White Heron.' It is partly a matter of technique, and Miss Jewett herself remarked, in the preface written for a new edition of her first book two years before 'The Pointed Firs,' that some of its sentences made her feel as if she were its author's grandmother. But this can be overstressed, since the immediate recognition of her early work was largely owing to the quiet incisiveness of its style. One of her first letters to Annie Fields contained this passage: 'There is a grey cloud-bank hanging over the sea all along the eastern horizon, and I think it is going to snow again, or rain. The wood-sleds are creeping out of the woods and into the village, and the oxen are like rocks from the pastures, or the

tops of ledges, they look so hard and tough and frosted over.' Its young writer had already achieved a power of carving descriptions not remote from Stephen Crane's.

And so the key to the difference between her early and late work lies rather in a remark she made afterwards to Willa Cather: 'The thing that teases the mind over and over for years and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper — whether little or great, it belongs to literature.' 'Deephaven' is not artificial, it possesses almost the same directness and simplification as 'The Pointed Firs,' but it is too conscious. It has not teased its writer's mind for years. At that time Sarah Jewett stood right in the middle of her experience, and was unable to see it in relation to the world outside. She needed detachment, to go away for twenty years, and then come back to Dunnet Landing as a visitor, but as a visitor made of its dust, and one whose heart had always been filled with its memories.

There are many passages in her first sketches and in her letters that read like rough drafts of her finished work. In June, 1885, she wrote to Mrs. Fields: 'Such a hot and agree-

able day as yesterday was! We played on the beach at Wells, but not quite so hard as at York, the sun being hotter. I got pretty tired, but enjoyed it all vastly, and met with many old friends at the fish-houses, R. M. and F., whom I wrote the story about, and old D. B. who can't go out fishing any more, so that he sits at home and *knits stockings* and thinks on his early days as an able seaman in foreign parts. His wife died two or three years ago and he calls her "Poor dear!" when he talks about her. And there was big C. D. and big H. R., who pulled him out of the waves at the Banks once, so that they are famous pals; all the old fishermen whom I have known since these many years; and A. and L. P. and younger fry, who were also cordial and yet not *so* dear. I lagged along from one fish-house door to the next, and thought I wasn't going to see D. B., the knitter, but early in the afternoon he rolled along as if he trod a quarter-deck all the way, and mentioned after a time that he saw me driving down — he saw a team and *got his glass* and found out it was I. My heart was quite touched when I found he hadn't been over to the moorings but once before this

spring! I don't think from the looks of him that he will be missing "Poor dear" a great while longer. Yet he asked for some good books of stories, *detective ones*, none of your lovesick kind, which he couldn't go!' Sarah Jewett carried the joy of this day, along with many others like it, in some latent corner of her consciousness, and eleven years after, greatly enlarged and enriched, it formed the nucleus of the chapter 'Along Shore' in 'The Pointed Firs,' and D. B. was transformed into Elijah Tilley, who talked about his 'poor dear.'

But analysis of this sort is too mechanical. Sarah Jewett was not aware of any such process. If she had watched herself in this way, she would probably never have gone beyond the self-conscious tone of 'Deephaven.' Her stories seemed to her to spring spontaneously. As she once told Willa Cather laughingly, her head was full of old houses and old women, and when an old house and an old woman came together in her brain with a click, she knew that a story was under way. The reason why they came together with a click was because the delight she had felt as a child in her village world never lost the edge

of its excitement. On September 3, 1897, she wrote to Sara Norton, 'This is my birthday, and I am always nine years old.' It was true. She continued to call on old Miss Cushing, and whenever she stepped into that parlor, she became the child who tried not to crumble her pound-cake.

Her hostess received her very graciously, and their talk was spirited, but it was clear to Miss Jewett that the old lady thought her just as young and unreliable as she had been forty years before. Miss Elisabeth's father was a Boston Cushing originally, and they had been for a long time newcomers in the village, having moved to Berwick in 1795, when Berwick, 'though small, was as proper a place to live in as Boston,' as Miss Elisabeth always said. Madam Cushing had been a kind of little old duchess, with great social faculty, a friend of Lafayette in the war times, so that on his royal progress he took pains to come to see her. Miss Jewett used still to hear that call reported with great particularity. She could not remember when Miss Cushing's thin bent figure had not looked old. And although her eyes had kept their blue clearness, she had

become more and more a recluse, and clung to her house and its past. At the end her mind wandered a little. A bare-looking Methodist Church was being built near by. And when Miss Jewett saw her peer out through the window and say, 'Charles, is that a ship I see? When are they going to launch?' she knew that Miss Cushing's life was still going on back in her own grandfather's time.

Not many years before 'The Pointed Firs' Miss Jewett's friend died at ninety-two, and Miss Jewett went to the funeral, and saw them carry her down the long, wide walk, between the tall box borders which had been her pride. The air was heavy and sweet with the perfume of the early summer blossoms. The white lilacs and the flowering currants were still in bloom, and the rows of her Dutch tulips had stood dismayed in their flaunting colors, and had watched her go away.

Because she treasured such memories and bathed them in the life-giving pools of her imagination, and because she possessed insight, a far rarer gift than observation, Sarah Jewett wrote 'The Country of the Pointed Firs.' It came out in instalments in the

'Atlantic' of 1896, and as a book in the fall. It was heralded at once as the acme of her achievement. William James wrote her a note, of which we have already seen the best phrase: 'Having just read your "Country of the Pointed Firs," I can't hold in from telling you what exquisite pleasure it has given me.... The proper reaction upon it is the uncontrollable expression of pleasure in one's face and not a pretense of analytic words from one's pen — and the expression is on my face whenever I think of it. Most gratefully yours.... P.S. My wife is just the same.' Thomas Wentworth Higginson, after reading the second section in the 'Atlantic,' told her, 'That last paper of yours is perfectly fascinating — your trip to the island — nothing in "Deephaven" is more redolent of bayberry and wild roses.... But are you sure you are right in putting a gaff to a spritsail?' And the rest of this letter is a long discussion of the point with drawings of various sails. Kipling said, 'It's immense — it is the very life. So many of the people of lesser sympathy have missed the lovely New England landscape, and the genuine New England nature.' And he added

in a postscript, 'I don't believe even you know how good that work is!' Edward Garnett wrote a paper in the London 'Academy' that was much to her satisfaction, especially some sentences at the end: 'Almost anybody can produce an arbitrary, concocted picture of life in which every line is a little false and every tone is exaggerated. Such pictures . . . serve their purpose. But, in relation to the rare art which synthesizes for us the living delicacy of nature, they are what most modern popular fiction is to the poetic realism of "The Country of the Pointed Firs." So delicate is the artistic lesson of this little masterpiece that it will probably be left for generations of readers less hurried than ours to assimilate.' And Annie Trumbull Slosson, herself a writer of New England stories, said from the strength of her feeling: 'This is, as far as I can remember, the first time I have ever addressed "an unknown author." But I have just laid down your "Country of the Pointed Firs," and want to say a few words about it. I tell you frankly that it may be partly because of my strong feeling as to the present condition of literature that I have taken this book so to my heart.

This day of Breathings, Sighs, Cameos, Silhouettes, Quatrains, Clots of Bloody Bravery, etc., etc., makes me tired. I'm dreadfully old, but I am young again for the hour as I read your story, and I want to thank you for doing and being all this I recognize.'

The emptiness of the literature of the late nineties cannot be exaggerated. A symbol of it is the number of the 'Atlantic' that marked the completion of its fortieth year in October, 1897. There is a paper by the distinguished French critic Brunetière, but the American names are hardly loud enough to be even an echo of the names that are gone. Stedman and Aldrich are now the principal poets. And except for Sarah Jewett's 'Martha's Lady,' the fiction consists of nothing more permanent than Kate Douglas Wiggin, and F. Hopkinson Smith. It is perfectly quiet and harmless, for it's thoroughly dead. The country as a whole was enthralled with the romantic historical novel. It was the day of 'To Have and to Hold,' 'The Seats of the Mighty,' and 'When Knighthood was in Flower.' This was a natural American craze. As has been shrewdly remarked, the themes of the general run of

historical novels are so remote, and ideas about them exist so nebulously in the popular mind that the writer can use any distortions that will pamper the fancy, and above all he can play on that extraordinary notion that human nature was different 'in those days,' and that the good old times were 'pretty,' and governed by fates sentimentally just. At least some of the authors can be exonerated from taking their works seriously, for F. Marion Crawford, as good a seller as any, bluntly refuted the critics by declaring that novelists are nothing more than public amusers who must always write largely about love, and, in Anglo-Saxon countries, under the eyes of the young girl.

There were a few more valuable books. Henry James was still pursuing his decorous art in the fastness of London. And even if most of the established figures were like Bret Harte, who had followed his early promise with forty mediocre volumes, or Howells, who was now in a period of turning out undistinguished farces, all the important new creative energy had not been deflected into industrial and scientific fields. Although lost in the crush where 'Monsieur Beaucaire' and 'Alice of Old

Vincennes' were running into the high hundred thousands, there still was an American literature. Edwin Arlington Robinson's 'Children of the Night' sounded in 1897 the first note of our modern poetry. Ambrose Bierce was continuing to print his short stories. And in the last five years of the century, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris shot like rockets through the sky, throwing off a shower of dazzling sparks before they crashed and disappeared. 'The Country of the Pointed Firs' burnt with no such spectacular flame, but its quiet sureness made its place secure.

It is doubtful how much these new names meant to Miss Jewett, for she considered herself completely the child of an earlier day. Or rather she did not think about it in these terms at all, but simply went ahead being what she was. The course of her ways led on just as before. She spent one winter along with the Aldriches and Mrs. Fields on a cruise to the West Indies in the yacht Hermione, and another going to Greece and Constantinople. In the year following 'The Pointed Firs' her sister Caroline Eastman died, whose initials she had put at the front of 'The Native of

THE DRAWING-ROOM AT 148 CHARLES STREET WITH
MISS JEWETT (LEFT) AND MRS. FIELDS

Winby' in 1893 with these words, 'To my dear younger sister: I have had many pleasures that were doubled because you shared them, and so I write your name at the beginning of this book.' Sarah Jewett felt such a loss keenly. She clung eagerly to having life go on just the same as when she was a child, and dreaded the thought of the other house across the yard being closed now that Caroline and her husband were both gone. To restore her spirits, Mrs. Fields persuaded her to take a third trip to France and England, and they went to visit all their old haunts and new ones too, to see the graves of the Brontës and Madame de Sévigné, to spend several weeks at Madame Blanc's country place at La Ferté, to journey into Provence for an afternoon with Mistral. And then that afternoon at Rye, when Henry James was bewildered at the miraculous youth of these astonishing ladies, and after which Mrs. Fields recorded happily in her Journal: 'After we returned to the parlor Mr. James took occasion to tell Sarah how deeply and sincerely he appreciated her work; how he re-reads it with increasing admiration.'

Miss Jewett's best new work was to follow

the line of her masterpiece. She wrote further stories about life in the Landing, 'The Dunnet Shepherdess,' and 'William's Wedding.' 'The Queen's Twin' came out in both the 'Atlantic' and 'Cornhill.' It told about Mis' Abby Martin who had been born the same day, and, allowing for the difference in time, the very same hour as the Queen. And she had married a man by the name of Albert, though she didn't get the news that the Queen had an Albert too till a fortnight afterward. She had shipped once with her husband, and when they anchored at the port of London, she heard that the Queen was going to a great review of her army, and went right up through the streets and worked to the front of the crowd by the palace, and saw her plain coming out 'all prancin' horses and shinin' gold.' Afterwards when her firstborn was a girl, she naturally called her Victoria; but the next one was a boy and her husband wanted the right to name him, and took his own name and his brother Edward's, and pretty soon Mis' Martin saw in the paper that the little Prince of Wales had been christened just the same. After that she made excuse to wait till she knew what the

Queen had named her children, for she didn't want to break the chain.... And now that they were all grown up, and gone away, or dead, Mis' Abby Martin still lived on ceremoniously, and spent all her spare money buying likenesses of her twin. And as Almiry Todd said, 'She's most covered her best-room wall now; she keeps that room shut up sacred as a meetin'-house! "I won't say but I have my favorites amongst 'em," she told me t'other day, "but they're all beautiful to me as they can be!" And she's made some kind o' pretty little frames for 'em all — you know there's always a new fashion o' frames comin' round; first 'twas shell-work, and then 'twas pine-cones, and bead-work's had its day, and now she's much concerned with perforated cardboard worked with silk. I tell you that best room's a sight to see!'

Miss Jewett was quite touched to find how many people in both countries approved this story, and cited anecdotes to show it might be true. And a little later she went to church and heard the sermon about the Queen: the church was decorated with English flags around a big picture, and there were two wreaths of Ber-

wick evergreen tied with black. There were some English parishioners among the mill people, but the whole feeling was as if some kind person had died in Sarah's own small neighborhood.

By this time she had written to Sara Norton: '"The Tory Lover" got itself done at last.... I grow very melancholy if I fall to thinking of the distance between my poor story and the first dreams of it, but I believe that I have done it just as well as I could.' She had tried a novel of Berwick in Revolutionary days, built around the Hamilton house and the busy river, and the love of Mary Hamilton which drove the brave loyalist Lieutenant Wallingford into the service of John Paul Jones. But she had had misgivings from the start which were not entirely allayed when she wrote to Horace Scudder: 'I can't help hoping that you will like this last one, "The Tory Lover," which has taken more than a solid year's hard work and the dreams and hopes of many a year beside. I have always meant to do what I could about keeping some of the old Berwick flowers in bloom, and some of the names and places alive in memory,

for with many changes in the old town they might be soon forgotten. It has been the happiest year of work that ever came to me as well as the hardest. A good deal of the tone of things which existed in those earlier days had survived into my own times: the fine old houses, the ladies and gentlemen of colonial days were not all gone. Dear Mr. Warner gave me the final push toward writing such a story when he was in Berwick once, and I am so glad to remember that he read some of the early chapters last summer, and took pleasure in them.'

'The Tory Lover' never received more than qualified praise. It carefully reconstructed a period, but not in words that suggested flesh and blood. However, the summer of its appearance brought Sarah Jewett a new pleasure. Bowdoin awarded her the first Litt.D. it had ever bestowed upon a woman. When she came home from its Commencement, she wrote to Annie Fields: 'I have so much to tell that my pen splutters. You can't think how nice it was to be the single sister of so many brothers at Bowdoin, walking in the procession in cap and gown and Doctor's hood,

and being fetched by a marshal to the President, to sit on the platform with the Board of Overseers and the Trustees, also the Chief Justice and all the Judges of the Supreme Court, who were in session in Portland, or somewhere near by! And being welcomed by the President in a set speech as the only daughter of Bowdoin, and rising humbly to make the best bow she could. And what was most touching was the old chaplain of the day who spoke about father in his "bidding prayer," and said those things of him which were all true. And your SOJ applauded twice by so great an audience!... Mary was dear and lovely, and the great day was hers as much as mine, as you will know.'

Guests continued to flow into the old house and out into the garden. Nearly all her Boston friends came down one time or another. And Mr. Howells used to take the trolley over from Kittery on summer afternoons. Once he and Mr. James arrived together, and such talk passed as left for Miss Jewett the clearest and brightest memories of that misty day, and both the distinguished gentlemen ate far too much cake for tea, and puffed a little when

they got up to go. Then one afternoon while she was taking some friends to drive, the carriage lurched sharply and she was thrown out, and received a terrible blow on her head and a dangerous shock to her spine. A complete loss of balance followed her recovery of consciousness, and she lay for weeks hardly able to move. When she could at last hold a pen for a few minutes, she wrote to T. B. A.: 'Perhaps you haven't heard what bad days I have fallen upon — or rather that I fell upon too hard a road the first of last month. I was thrown out of a high wagon and hurt my head a good deal and concussioned my spine, so that I am still not very well mended, and have to stay in bed or lie down nearly all the time.' It was much later before she had strength enough to scribble at long intervals to Mr. Howells: '. . . You will both know how hard it is not to go to Mrs. Fields — but after all these weeks I am still in my room. The trouble was that I came down on my head, and there is apparently some far greater offense in *half* breaking one's neck than in breaking it altogether.

'But your book carries me away from all

these things. I don't know whether I love "The Summer Colonist" better than the "O-hi-o" or not, and so many kindnesses touch my heart as I go along the pages. I have read, first of all, the things that I had read before and liked them better than ever. It is like a second volume of "Venetian Life" to me somehow, with just as young a heart in "The Summer Colonist" and the other, and the same fresh eyes. I was wondering the other day if "The Kentons" would not start a new thing for people to say to you — they seem to have made certain of one's old books, but when "The Pointed Firs" was printed the few survivors who still said that one had never done anything so good as "Deephaven," did venture to speak of that! They stick by it too, and needed more reassurance about "The Tory Lover" than they could find, though I wrote that by heart even better than the other: better than "Deephaven" even, but the two together hold all my knowledge, real knowledge, and all my dreams about my dear Berwick and York and Wells — the people I know and have heard about: the very dust of thought and association that made me! But

one can't always say things as one should, when we care most; sometimes I write only the clumsy body, not the soul, and people find something that doesn't seem quite alive!

'This letter seems to have gone on from "blood-curdling tales of lobster pots" to "endeavouring their poor best" on one of your last pages: you will think it like one of those long calls upon an editor when the writer was nineteen or twenty. I believe that I am poorly enough making it serve for the visit I was hoping to make you and to have from you in September. Every time I have laid the letter down I have wished to take it up again, and go on as soon as I could get it! It does not ask for any answer, I shall find that in your letter and the book. With love and dear remembrance, Yours most lovingly. . . .'

She slowly resumed life. She was able the next winter to meet Alice Meynell, whose poems had long delighted her, though she felt a little apprehension at the thought of seeing such an old friend for the first time. But they took to each other from the start, and Sarah Jewett added another to the large group with

whom she was closely intimate. Later she received Mrs. Meynell's next book during one of the tedious periods when she had to go away to the mountains alone with a nurse. And she wrote after her return, 'I never knew how I loved you, either in your work or out of it, before that summer brought me a long way further into the country of our friendship.'

She was forced to reconcile herself to these long stretches of utter solitude away from home. As she wrote to Aldrich from Mouse Island, Boothbay, she had again succeeded in getting only half well, 'and the doctor sternly packed me off a fortnight ago to-morrow to a "new place" and one where I knew nobody and could stay out of doors. I had been here long ago and knew how good and salt the air was. The island was all my own for the first week, and I sat in the fir woods nearly all day, and read, or watched for an old capable partridge and her flock of chickens.' She found that any spot of country where there was a large still sky and plenty of trees had a way of waiting quietly around her until she suddenly realized that she had become a piece of it, in-

stead of a foreign substance thrown onto it by chance. If she kept to one place to go and sit, this feeling came faster, and things were always happening to amuse her: an ant with a crumb, a bird going up and down a limb, or a fluttering tree that stood in front of her until it grew to seem like a quiet person.

She had begun to read again, everything under the sun. She was writing Mrs. Fields about 'Middlemarch' and a translation of Æschylus, and Mahan's 'Influence of Sea Power on History.' And with new hope of her own work flitting through her brain she said, 'Yesterday afternoon I amused myself with Miss Austen's "Persuasion." Dear me, how like her people are to the people we knew years ago! It is just as much New England before the war — that is, in provincial towns — as it ever was Old England. I am going to read another, "Persuasion" tasted so good!' She could now say that she had really come back to some sense of pleasure in life, and was able to undertake the editing of the letters of Mrs. Whitman, who died in 1904. Still her wits kept getting blurred over easily, and she felt like a puzzle that had been put together with a few

pieces gone. After two or three dizzying efforts to start a story, she had to remark wryly: 'I believe no longer in Habit, for why should writing be the most difficult thing now when I spent all my life once doing it?'

She still kept dreaming of Boston, and entered into all Mrs. Fields' pleasures in her thoughts: '. . . and now the ball is over and I suppose a tired hostess, and the chairs all going upstairs again, and the dear room will look like a green garden that no wind ever blows over! I do so long to hear if it went off to your mind, and if the company liked the singing, and where it was you hung the lantern! and oh, dear! a thousand questions!' But a trip to town was quite an undertaking, and frequently she had to confess that it seemed a very long journey, and she could hardly sit up in her place in the car. And when she was there, she was often obliged to stay in, and mournfully refuse to see any one. But other times she had one of her surprising bursts of spirits, and went about with the semblance of her generous gaiety. She made new contacts. She grew interested at once in Willa Cather, who had just come to Boston, and did everything for

her she could. She was still able to be present on some of the great occasions. Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, the author of 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' and she were the only two women on the crowded platform at the celebration of the Longfellow Centennial. And she observed a sadder occasion also, and wrote to Mr. Howells after it:

'I saw you to-day at the Appleton Chapel and I felt as one sometimes feels at the sight of an old friend — a new spring coming from a deeper place in the hillside of life, of attachment and affection. And I thought that you in your friendship and I in mine with dear Mr. Norton know some things together and hold them with dear love and gratitude for our very own, that many of the old Cambridge neighbors and cousins of varying degrees could never know. Maine and Ohio had not given you and me certain things that his kind hand held waiting — perhaps he cared too about our Ohio and Maine dust that we brought to him! What a dear friend — what a helper and teacher he has been! but how he has made us value the dust of which we are made, and how the springs of friendship quickly washed away

everything but some fairy gold when we were with him.

'I look back to my first visit to Ashfield more and more thankfully every year, and I love to remember that Mr. Lowell helped me to know Mr. Norton, to know one was to know the other. How he said things about our stories — how he *didn't* say things; how quick his letters came when we were in trouble, how sure we were that he understood why some happy days and hours were so happy! I turn to you to say this as I could not turn to any one else, and find a beautiful new reason for our being friends. I think that in coming days the thought of you will be a great comfort often and often when you do not know it, to Sally. She is very fond of you and I know that her father's love for you will be a most treasured legacy to her. I hope in my heart that you will see her whenever you can. I think of this as one of her truest comforts.

'I hoped to be at South Berwick long ago and to have you and dear Mrs. Fields see each other there, but three weeks ago just as we were going down, she fell very ill and is only just recovering. We shall be in town next

week, I hope. Forgive this letter if it says wrong things — words are very bungling sometimes, but I should not send it if we had been near enough to even touch hands for one moment before we went our ways. Give my love to Mrs. Howells and Pilla.

'Affectionately yours, always,

'S. O. J.'

Berwick became more and more her constant home just as it had been when she was a girl. Her joy in it was never failing. Even before her accident she had remarked that as she grew older it had been one of the best things in life to take up some of the friendships that her mother had to let fall. There was a double sweetness in doing this, for she felt so much of the old people's pleasure who seemed to see in her something of their former companionship return. And now she got out in the village as much as she could, especially while the snow lasted, for she liked runners better than wheels. On town-meeting days she could at least sit in one of the front windows upstairs, and watch the sleighs jingling in from the Agamenticus region bearing the

farmers in their fur caps, and their wives who had come 'trading.' And she wanted to run out and shake hands hard with two or three of them, for she knew they would repeat their slow question of fifty years ago: 'Now which one of the Doctor's girls be *you?*'

She devised every possible errand in the local shops. Whenever old Mrs. Howe came to visit they always went to 'Stacy's' and 'Willard's' and both fell before the temptations of pins and handkerchiefs with beautiful borders spread out right within reach of their hands. And this started her thinking: 'Sometime I must tell you about a nice person who kept a true Cranford shop, and used to say such nice things to a customer: Miss Morrill, round and short like a stand-up pin cushion — you expected to buy pins right off her shoulders!' She began to tell herself a story about it, and hoped to put it down. She wrote to Harriet Prescott Spofford in the spring of 1908: 'Perhaps some day now, in the right place and with the right kind of quietness, I shall find myself beginning all over again; but it will be a timid young author enough! We do have our long years' use of that strange little tool,

HALL OF THE SOUTH BERWICK HOUSE

the pen, to fall back upon, and that must count for something — the wonder and uncertainty is about a "living spring," as country people would say, to come out of the hillside with proper water for ink.' She had managed to have something in print again, and that made her feel a little more alive in the world, and she could say to Willa Cather that summer: 'You will find that I sent a verse that I found among my papers to "McClure's" — and I did it as a sort of sign and warrant of my promise to you. No story yet, but I do not despair; I begin to dare to think that if I could get a quiet week or two, I could get something done for you, and it should be for you, who gave me a "hand up" in the spring.'

But she could not stand the strain of any sustained effort, and often had to take ruefully to crocheting, instead of reading all the time as she used. Somehow even after all these years that strange loss of balance kept coming back, and making her former precision of phrase an utter impossibility. Still, in the early winter, she wanted so much to talk to Willa Cather about her stories that she managed to write a long letter. She felt it was

impossible for her young friend's gifts to mature as they should in the face of the incessant responsibilities demanded by her magazine office, and Miss Jewett knew to her sorrow that when one's first working power has spent itself nothing ever brings it back quite the same. Willa was older now than her first stories; she had been living and reading and knowing new types, but if she did not guard and mature her force, and above all have time and quiet to perfect her work, she would be writing things not much better than she had five years ago. Miss Jewett wanted her to be surer of her backgrounds: she had uncommon equipment in her child's Virginia, her Nebraska life, and now her intimate knowledge of newspaper 'Bohemia,' but she did not see them yet quite enough from the outside — she stood right in the middle of each of them when she wrote without having the standpoint of the looker-on who takes them in their relation to letters and to the world. Willa needed reassurance — every artist does! — but she needed still more to find her 'own quiet center of life, and write from that to the world that holds offices, and all society, all

Bohemia; the city, the country — in short, you must write to the human heart, the great consciousness that all humanity goes to make up. Otherwise what might be strength in a writer is only crudeness, and what might be insight is only observation; sentiment falls to sentimentality — you can write about life, but never life itself.

'And to write and work on this level, we must live on it — we must at least recognize it and defer to it at every step. We must be ourselves, but we must be our best selves. If we have patience with cheapness and thinness, as Christians must, we must know that it *is* cheapness and not make believe about it. To work in silence and with all one's heart, that is the writer's lot; he is the only artist who must be a solitary, and yet needs the widest outlook upon the world. But you have been growing, I feel sure, in the very days when you felt most hindered, and this will be counted to you. You need to have time to yourself and time to read and add to your recognitions.' Miss Jewett could not remember when a letter had grown so long, and written itself so easily.

That whole winter she was sustained by this

eager interchange of thoughts with all her friends. But one day she wrote, 'Dear, I do not know what to do with me,' and Mrs. Fields, who had often been startled by the largeness of Sarah's courage, sensed at once the meaning of any shadow on that self-reliant spirit. She knew it meant the end. Miss Jewett's vitality slowly ebbed away like the tide. She lingered through the spring, and then died quietly. Mr. Howells wrote to her nephew, 'She was a dear and beautiful soul, and her art was like her. There will be others, but what she was and what she did will never be and never be done again.'

It was the twenty-fourth of June, 1909. Sarah Jewett had said years before: 'I was born here and I hope to die here, leaving the lilac bushes still green and growing, and all the chairs in their places.'

V

SARAH JEWETT gauged her own achievement. One can read the full definition of both her aim and result in those early letters to Scudder, and her mature remarks to Aldrich and Willa Cather. She supplemented all these when she wrote to Charles Miner Thompson thanking him for the critical essay about her work that he had contributed to the 'Atlantic' for October, 1904. She had been reading one of Turgenieff's stories, and was struck by the likeness in Stepniak's preface to what Mr. Thompson had said about herself: 'But there was in him such a love of light, sunshine, and living human poetry, such an organic aversion to all that is ugly, or coarse, or discordant, that he made himself almost exclusively the poet of the gentler side of human nature. On the fringe of his pictures, or in their background, just for the sake of contrast, he will show us the vices, the cruelties, even the mire of life. But he cannot stay in these gloomy regions, and he hastens back to the realms of the sun and the flowers, or to the poetical moonlight of melan-

choly, which he loves best because in it he can find expression for his own great sorrowing heart.'

What Mr. Thompson had said was that he would always think of her as one who, hearing New England accused of being a bleak land without beauty, passed confidently over the snow, and by the gray rock, and the dark fir tree, to a southern bank, and there, brushing away the decayed leaves, triumphantly showed to the fault-finder a spray of trailing arbutus. That flower, as he observed, was the fit symbol for her delicate art. Miss Jewett herself could see that both were equal products of the soil. And they would not stand transplanting. Whenever she strayed away from her own field, it was as if her words were nipped by a blight. Even those slight excursions on which she tried to catch the quality of the new French and Irish settlers in her region, even that trip into the well-known territory of Berwick's past, did not yield any of the authentic flavor. And her city folks, her fine ladies and gentlemen of Boston, are as vapid as the illustrations which sometimes adorned them in the fashionable magazines.

As long as she stayed within the limits of Dunnet township she flourished abundantly. And if the trailing arbutus is the symbol of her form, Almiry Todd stands stalwartly as the essence of its content. At first sight Mrs. Todd seemed warm-hearted and talkative and quite absorbed in her bustling industries. Only after one still evening when the moon was high and the cool air from the sea blew the penetrating fragrance of some rare herb in from the garden did her figure take on a universal significance. She had followed the usual commonplace news of the day with the story of what lay deepest in her heart, and as she stood afterwards in the center of a braided rug and its rings of black and gray seemed to circle about her feet in the dim glow, her height and massiveness in the low room gave her the look of a sibyl. Later, as Sarah Jewett watched her for the last time treading the rocky shore path up from the Port, her great determined shape appeared suddenly mateless and appealing. An absolute archaic grief possessed this country woman. She might have been Antigone alone on the Theban plain.

No survey of Miss Jewett's work more

extensive than an 'Atlantic' essay was written within her lifetime. During the two years following her death, Mrs. Fields devoted herself to preparing an edition of Sarah's letters, to which Henry James hoped to furnish an introduction: 'I would for instance with pleasure address you a letter, as editor — a letter of reminiscence and appreciation and making twenty-five pages of print or so, which would serve, if you cared, as Introduction to your volume: a thing very frank, familiar, as a thorough friend; and oh so tender and so admiring — as I *do* admire her work!' He was unable to fulfill that desire, and regretted it in a later paper in the 'Atlantic,' where he began an abbreviated paragraph of appreciation with this sentence: 'Her admirable gift, that artistic sensibility in her which rivaled the rare personal, that sense for the finest kind of truthful rendering, the sober and tender note, the temperately touched, whether in the ironic or the pathetic, would have deserved some more pointed commemoration than I judge her beautiful little quantum of achievement, her free and high, yet all so generously subdued character, a sort of elegance of humility

or fine flame of modesty, with her remarkably distinguished outward stamp, to have called forth before the premature and overdarkened close of her young course of production.' It is probably lucky that Mr. James had to do himself the violence of suppressing the chapter of appreciation that he should long since somewhere have found space for; since, with all the good intentions in the world, he could hardly have failed to smother her fragile blossoms beneath this shower of dead leaves.

By the time he had written this passage as a parenthesis in an essay about the Fields, Mrs. Fields was dead, the house on Charles Street had been torn down to make room for a public garage, the war had begun, and the last fragments of Miss Jewett's world were smashed to annihilation. If Edward Garnett's remark that 'The Country of the Pointed Firs' would remain for a less hurried generation to assimilate was true in 1903, in these years it inevitably disappeared almost entirely. And when the smoke had cleared away, it became apparent that a wholly new evaluation was demanded of her period, and all it had stood for.

In the first place, when Henry James spoke

of the house as 'the waterside museum of the Fieldses,' he meant it as a playful compliment. But to-day many of its ghosts are viewed with suspicion, and their attitude toward life does not always seem free from the preciousness and aloofness from reality embedded in that phrase. Sarah Jewett's debonair, generous T. B. A. is not the Aldrich we see. Instead there emerges a fastidious, querulous figure whose sensitive spirit was vexed at anything that might disturb the gentility of his established Boston. He wrote to Stedman, 'Whitman's manner is a hollow affectation and represents neither the man nor the time. As the voice of the nineteenth century he will have little significance in the twenty-first. That he will outlast the majority of his contemporaries, I haven't the faintest doubt — but it will be in a glass case or a quart of spirits in an anatomical museum.' He asked a lady contributor to the 'Atlantic': 'Why should we print in a magazine those intimate revelations which we wouldn't dream of confiding to the bosom of an utter stranger at an evening party?' His penetration into social questions is sufficiently clear from his statement, 'We shall have

bloody work in this country some of these days when the lazy canaille get organized. They are the spawn of Santerre and Fouquier-Tinville.' Pure English was his passion, and he was led to exclaim when Kipling came along, 'At a time when it is supposed to be poetical to write "Gawd" instead of God . . . perhaps silence is the best poem for a man who respects his art.' And more damaging than any of these remarks are the terms in which his friends praised him. It always seemed to them that Aldrich belonged to other times than his own, that he had strayed like a traveller out of an earlier century, that there was something of Herrick in him, and something of Sir Philip Sidney. Unhappily that can be translated to mean that he did not possess enough vitality to perceive the significant movements of his own period, and that, although as highly endowed with a good ear and a delicate mastery of line as any New England poet has ever been, he was too hopelessly literary ever to grasp any life.

Howells was the champion of realism and gallantly welcomed Miss Jewett under his standard. He outlined his theory in 'Criti-

cism and Fiction,' which was excellent in discriminating that the main line of great novelists leads from Jane Austen to Balzac, Flaubert, and Tolstoy, and not through Thackeray and Dickens. But what is realism? Howells possessed very great technical skill, but the tragic reason why 'Silas Lapham' or half a dozen equally even books never quite arrived in the first class is indicated in his now notorious statement. He showed a fatal blindness to the variety of life when he said that our novelists should concern themselves with its more smiling aspects, which are the more American. Observing a land where carpenters and plumbers struck for four dollars a day, and the sum of hunger and cold was comparatively small, he accepted in the complacent manner of the thorough bourgeois the measurement of a civilization by its externals alone. Were the aspects of life that Hawthorne's spirit had found particularly smiling, or Poe's, or Melville's, or even his own friend Mark Twain's?

Howells was also narrow. To those who protested that the Young Girl sealed their lips whenever they wanted to write an American 'Anna Karénina' or 'Madame Bovary,' his

answer was that she had never done anything of the sort: 'The manners of the novel have been improving with those of its readers; that is all. Gentlemen no longer swear or fall drunk under the table, or abduct young ladies and shut them up in lonely country-houses, or so habitually set about the ruin of their neighbors' wives as they once did. Generally, people now call a spade an agricultural implement; they have not grown decent without having also grown a little squeamish, but they have grown comparatively decent; there is no doubt of that.' His 'Literary Friends and Acquaintance' is painful reading. The duties of an editor and proof-reader are talked about in precisely the same tone as the interchange of ideas. Under his kindly, prosy hand the members of the Boston group appear pathetically smug and futile. They are revealed in such naïve flashes as, 'I was speaking of a paper in the Magazine on the "Claudian Emissary," and I demanded (no doubt a little too airily) something like "Who in the world ever heard of the Claudian Emissary?" "*You are in Cambridge*, Mr. Howells," Lowell answered and laughed at my confusion.'

Even more damning to his position as a realist, and to the penetration of his spirit are such places as the one where he notes in the perfect manner of the church sociable, in speaking of Lowell, 'Any grossness of speech was inconceivable in him.' The fact itself may be true enough, and is harmless, but what of the mind that considers such a fact of sufficient importance to be given space in the portrait of a poet and critic? And the utter failure of Victorian Boston to understand the value of experience could not be recorded with more devastating precision than in his easy reflection that elsewhere we literary people are apt to be such a common lot, 'but at Boston we were of ascertained and noted origin, and a good part of us dropped from the skies. Instead of holding horses before the doors of theatres . . . we were good society from the beginning. I think this was none the worse for us and it was vastly better for good society.' In the face of all this it is hard to remember that he is the same man who resolutely defended Crane's 'Maggie, a Girl of the Streets,' or the courageous way he supported the Chicago strikers.

It is unnecessary to listen to many more of Miss Jewett's circle to be reminded how remote their values of life are from any that are cherished to-day. She thought Lowell second only to Tennyson in greatness. Poet, scholar, statesman, the first editor of the 'Atlantic,' the critic with the widest horizon and deepest roots in all literatures of any one in America, he was a frequent visitor in Charles Street. Mrs. Fields once recorded in her Journal his enthusiastic declaration that Fielding was the master novelist, but 'he could not tell his boys at Cambridge to read "Tom Jones," for it might do them harm. . . . Thackeray and the rest were pleasant reading, very pleasant, and yet how could he tell his class that he read "Tom Jones" once a year?' When he undertook to analyze the author of 'The Divine Comedy,' he prefaced his discussion with, 'Let us dismiss at once and forever all the idle tales of Dante's amours.' After that it is hardly useful to pay much attention to his flowing words on a contemporary: 'I have not seen Swinburne's new volume — but a poem or two from it which I have seen shocked me and I am not squeamish. . . . Why should a

man by choice go down to live in his cellar instead of mounting to those fair upper chambers which look towards the sunrise of that Easter which shall greet the resurrection of the soul from the body of this death? *Virginibus puerisque?* To be sure! let no man write a line that he would not have his daughter read. . . . But I have outlived many heresies, and shall outlive this new Adamite one of Swinburne. The true Church of poetry is founded on a rock, and I have no fear that these smutchy back doors of hell shall prevail against her.' Not very useful, for it is plain that we cannot talk to him. His mind and ours are not within shouting distance.

These are the men whose thought composed the intellectual atmosphere that Sarah Jewett breathed. How does her ghost appear beside the others? Is it as scarred by the grasp of time? If you read her letters as we have read Aldrich's and Lowell's, you are bothered by the too frequent use of the adjectives 'little' and 'dear.' A faint odor of rose leaves emerges. You are reminded of her inability to portray passion in her books. She always paints the gentler emotions: blinding hates and jealous-

ies, the fever of lust and the thirst of avarice never throb there. Even her few lovers are almost invariably wooden and silly. And yet only three years ago Willa Cather wrote: 'If I were asked to name three American books which have the possibility of a long life, I would say at once, "The Scarlet Letter," "Huckleberry Finn," and "The Country of the Pointed Firs." I can think of no others that confront time and change so serenely.'

Serene is the very adjective to use. It suggests the unhurried sureness of her pictures of Maine life, the radiant simplicity of her spirit which bathed her scenes and characters in its own delicate, but uncompromising light. She has withstood the onslaught of time, and is secure within her limits, because she achieved a style. Style means that the author has fused his material and his technique with the distinctive quality of his personality. No art lasts without this fusion. If the material is important and the technique crude, the work will continue to have historical value, such as even the clumsiest Dreiser novels will have in throwing light upon their time, but they are not works of art. If the technique is skillful

but the personality hollow, the product will fade like that of the poetasters of every generation. Without style Sarah Jewett's material would be too slight to attract a second glance. With it she has created — not a world, but a township in the State of Maine.

This is what chiefly separates her from Miss Wilkins. The author of 'A Humble Romance' had come to grips with many more sides of life than the author of 'Deephaven,' and she set them down unflinchingly. She had observed the New England character, and could record its peculiar traits. Her early stories burn with the life of hard experience. But she never went beyond them. Her long list of pictures of other regions and romantic novels is disappointingly pale, and also reveals an unexpected sentimental streak. And now, after forty years, even her book of triumph, true and vivid as parts of it are, seems to incline a little more towards being valuable social history than to a masterpiece in its own right. Miss Wilkins is often caught in her details, and no story of her whole lot establishes its atmosphere with the completeness of the opening lines of 'Miss Tempy's Watchers':

'The time of the year was April; the place was a small farming town in New Hampshire, remote from any railroad. One by one the lights had been blown out in the scattered houses near Miss Tempy Dent's; but as her neighbors took a last look out-of-doors, their eyes turned with instinctive curiosity toward the old house, where a lamp burned steadily. They gave a little sigh. "Poor Miss Tempy!" said more than one bereft acquaintance; for the good woman lay dead in her north chamber, and the light was a watcher's light. The funeral was set for the next day, at one o'clock.' The entire story is simply the night passed in the kitchen by Miss Tempy's watchers. Mrs. Crowe was knitting a blue yarn stocking for her husband. Sister Binson made some futile attempts at sewing, only to drop her work into her lap whenever the talk became engaging. One hears the cadence of their voices, and sees the lamplight on each worn face, and gradually Miss Tempy rises through their talk into a reality which pervades every corner of the tiny house. That is all. Yet it possesses an inevitability Miss Wilkins never attained. Her words are sometimes crude and fumbling. It

demanded the fullness of Miss Jewett's vision to keep her from lifeless photography on the one hand, and strained exaggeration on the other.

Style has not been such a common phenomenon in America that its possessor can ever be ignored. Sarah Jewett realized its full importance, though she naturally expressed it in somewhat different terms. She said once to Mrs. Whitman: 'You bring something to the reading of a story that the story would go very lame without; but it is those unwritable things that the story holds in its heart, if it has any, that make the true soul of it, and these must be understood. . . . In France there is such a code, such recognitions, such richness of allusions; but here we confuse our scaffoldings with our buildings.' She instinctively thought of France, for the clarity and precision of phrase she always sought have flowered most on that soil. Yet she who possessed these French qualities to almost as great a degree as any one who has lived in America is anything but French in spirit. The countrysides of Madame Bovary and Almiry Todd are at least a hemisphere apart.

There is a stark New England Sarah Jewett does not show, sordid, bleak, and mean of spirit. She looked at nature in its milder moods, and at mankind in its more subdued states of tenderness and resignation. But she did not live in an unreal paradise. She was aware of all these aspects, she simply did not emphasize them. If the Almiry Todd you generally see is the humorous figure sitting heavily in the stern of a dory, you are not allowed to forget that forty years before her young heart had been filled with an impossible love; and although she had since been handled with the commonplace marriage and death of her fisherman husband, it has not dimmed her memory.

Miss Jewett does not generally deal with the central facts of existence. You do not remember her characters as you do the atmosphere that seems to detach from their rusty corduroys and the folds of their gingham dresses. Her township was on the decline, and to her eyes it was a place where emotion was recollected in tranquillity. The women on its barren poor-farm carry on animated gossip about old times. In 'The Only Rose' a widow

who has buried three husbands tries to decide which of them deserves to wear upon his grave the single rose of her garden. But neither her first spouse Albert, nor the subsequent Mr. Wallis or Mr. Bickford is finally honored with the flower. As her nephew John lifts the baskets, the rose falls out and he takes it for his sweetheart. And Mrs. Bickford laughs where the old lady of modern fiction would doubtless feel embittered.

Nowhere except in America and at the present time would it be necessary to defend a writer for handling pathos and humour instead of the stronger chords of passion. If there are the villages of Flaubert and Sherwood Anderson, those of Jane Austen and Mrs. Gaskell also stand secure. It is true that when a woman of to-day creates a picture of New England the things she sees are very different from what Miss Jewett saw. 'Ethan Frome' was written only fifteen years after 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' but it reveals in every respect the mark of another generation. Mrs. Wharton's is a violent story depending for its effect on the tightness of its plot. It is breathless, sinister, its three characters are seared in

the furnace of love and hate until all that is left are shells of human impotence. Yet if you read it directly after 'The Pointed Firs,' strong and intense as the newer book is, it seems like a *tour de force*. It is a brilliant novel, but Starkfield might be anywhere: it is penetrated with little of the distinctive flavor of New England. The vitality is more on the surface than it is in Miss Jewett's book.

The distinction and refinement of Sarah Jewett's prose came out of an America which, with its Tweed rings and grabbing Trusts, its blatantly moneyed New York and squalid frontier towns, seemed most lacking in just these qualities. They are essentially a feminine contribution, and the fact that they now appear more valuable than anything the men of her generation could produce is a symptom of what had happened to New England since the Civil War. The vigorous genius of the earlier golden day had left no sons. Emily Dickinson is the heir of Emerson's spirit, and Sarah Jewett the daughter of Hawthorne's style. In the whole group of proud Brahmins whom Miss Jewett knew, and revered as far wiser and stronger than herself, there is not one with her

severity of form and subtle elimination. Their words are heavy and diffuse, lacking balance, lacking concentration. And so they are sinking slowly, while hers go lightly forward, and she takes her place next Emily Dickinson — the two principal women writers America has had.

It is easy to object to Miss Cather's list of lasting American books. 'Leaves of Grass' and 'Moby Dick' throb with a deeper potency than any of them. But 'The Country of the Pointed Firs' is impressive in its quietness, and it has gained the end suggested to its author by Flaubert — it has made us dream.

THE END

NOTE

THE best approach to Sarah Orne Jewett is through the two-volume selection of her work arranged with a Preface by Willa Cather, and printed by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1925. This includes the whole of 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' and a further dozen of her most distinctive stories. A larger selection was first issued by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1910 in seven volumes, with the following titles: 'Deephaven,' 'A Country Doctor,' 'Tales of New England,' 'A Native of Winby, and Other Tales,' 'The Life of Nancy,' 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' and 'The Queen's Twin, and Other Stories.'

The complete list of her books of short stories and novels, all in the hands of Houghton Mifflin Company, is as follows: 'Deephaven' (1877), 'Old Friends and New' (1879), 'Country By-Ways' (1881), 'The Mate of the Daylight and Friends Ashore' (1883), 'A Country Doctor' (1884), 'A Marsh Island' (1885), 'A White Heron, and Other Stories,' (1886), 'The King of Folly Island, and Other People' (1888),

'Tales of New England' (selections from earlier volumes, 1890), 'Strangers and Wayfarers' (1890),'A Native of Winby, and Other Tales' (1893), 'The Life of Nancy' (1895), 'The Country of the Pointed Firs' (1896), 'The Queen's Twin, and Other Stories' (1899), 'The Tory Lover' (1901).

In addition to these are her three books for children: 'Play-Days' (1878), 'Betty Leicester' (1889), 'Betty Leicester's Christmas' (privately printed for the Bryn Mawr School in 1894, and publicly, 1899); and her 'Story of the Normans' (Putnam, 1887).

The two-hundred-and-fifty-page selection of her letters made by Mrs. Fields was published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1911. 'Verses by Sarah Orne Jewett' was privately printed for her friends in 1916. Many of her less important stories still remain uncollected in a great variety of magazines of her time.

In my picture of Sarah Orne Jewett my chief debt is to herself. All the aspects of her life that I have emphasized are embedded somewhere in her writings. The incidents and conversations are never fanciful, but are based on passages in her sketches, and as often as

I could I have simply paraphrased her own words. My friend Russell Cheney not only gave me the idea of the book, and its three best pages, but also introduced me to Miss Mary Rice Jewett. She generously gave me the use of the material, and without her constant interest and allusion much of it could never have taken on life. My acquaintance with her has been one of the brightest passages in two years' very happy work. Among others I am indebted for letters and suggestions to Miss Mildred Howells, the authorities of the Aldrich Memorial in Portsmouth, Mr. Mark A. DeW. Howe, Mr. Bliss Perry, Mrs. Ingersoll Bowditch, Mr. H. E. Magill, Miss Frances Morse, Mr. Arthur W. Page, Mr. and Mrs. Harold J. Shurtleff, Mrs. Henry Parkman, Dr. Theodore Jewett Eastman, Mr. Theodore Spencer, and Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. Several newspaper and magazine articles have also been to my advantage, particularly one by Miss Esther Forbes in the 'Boston Transcript' for May 16, 1925.

F. O. M.

Kittery Point, Maine
August, 1928

INDEX

(Such dates are given as are of particular significance for the subject)
Academy, The, 109
Æschylus, 123
Alcott, Louisa, 35
Aldrich, Thomas Bailey (*1836–1907*), 60, 61, 62, 71, 74 f., 92 f., 96, 110, 112, 119, 122, 133, 138 f., 144
Andersen, Hans, 35
Anderson, Sherwood (*1876–*), 150
Arnold, Matthew (*1822–1888*), 71, 73
Atlantic Monthly, The (*1857–*), 33, 37, 41, 47, 54, 59 f., 63, 74, 80, 81, 92, 108, 110, 114, 133, 136, 138, 141, 143
Austen, Jane (*1775–1817*), 14, 123, 140, 150

Balzac, 140
Bell, Mrs., 85
Bierce, Ambrose (*1842–1916?*), 112
Blake, William, 70
Blanc, Madame, 87, 113
Booth, Edwin, 85
Brontë sisters, Charlotte (*1816–1855*); Emily (*1818–1848*), 113
Brooks, Bishop, 88
Browne, Sir Thomas, 65, 94
Browning, Robert, 69
Brunetière, Ferdinand, 110
Bryant, William Cullen (*1794–1878*), 60
Burroughs, John (*1837–1921*), 63

Cable, George W. (*1844–1925*), 61
Cabot, Mrs., 86
Cather, Willa (*1876–*), 103, 105, 124, 129, 130 f., 133, 145, 152
Century, The, 81
Cervantes, 14
Choate, Rufus, 85
Cornhill, The, 114
Craddock, Charles Egbert, pseudonym of Mary N. Murfree (*1850–1922*), 61
Cranch, Christopher P., 60
Crane, Stephen (*1871–1900*), 103, 112, 142
Crawford, F. Marion, 111
Cushing, Miss, 5, 6, 106, 107
Cushing, Madam, 106

Dana, Richard Henry, Jr. (*1815–1882*), 65
Dante, 60, 143
Daudet, Alphonse, 64
Dickens, Charles, 70, 140
Dickinson, Emily (*1830–1886*), 151, 152
Donne, John, 65
Dreiser, Theodore (*1871–*), 145
Du Maurier, George (*1834–1896*), 86, 90

Eastman, Caroline Jewett (*1855–1897*), Sarah Jewett's sister, 13, 112, 113
Eastman, Dr. Theodore Jewett, Sarah Jewett's nephew, 79, 132
Eliot, Alice C., early pseudonym of Sarah Orne Jewett, 32

Eliot, George (*1819–1880*), 123
Emerson, Ralph Waldo (*1803–1882*), 20, 59, 65, 151

Fielding, Henry, 14, 143
Fields, James T. (*1817–1881*), 33, 47, 61, 69 f., 73, 137, 138
Fields, Mrs. James T. (*1834–1915*), 65, 69 f., 73, 77, 78 f., 81, 82, 84, 85, 102, 103, 112, 113, 117, 119, 123, 124, 126, 132, 136, 137, 138, 143
Flaubert, Gustave (*1821–1880*), 67, 80, 140, 148, 150, 152
Freeman, Edward, 91
Froude, James A., 39
Freeman, Mary E. Wilkins (*1862–*), 83, 97, 99, 146 f.

Garnett, Edward, 109, 137
Gaskell, Mrs. (*1810–1865*), 14, 150
Godkin, E. L., 54
Grant, General, 74

Hale, Edward E., 60
Harper's, 81
Harte, Bret (*1839–1902*), 61, 111
Hawthorne, Nathaniel (*1804–1864*), 59, 97, 140, 145, 151
Hay, John, 60
Herrick, Robert, 139
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth, 108
Holmes, Oliver Wendell (*1809–1894*), 60, 63, 71, 88
Howe, Julia Ward, 125, 128
Howells, William Dean (*1837–1920*), 33, 37, 45, 47, 54, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 74, 96, 102, 111, 118, 119, 125, 132, 139 f.
Hunt, Leigh, 69
Hunt, William, 70
Huxley, Mrs., 87

Independent, The, 38, 40, 42

James, Henry, Sr., 60
James, Henry, Jr. (*1843–1916*), 61, 69, 111, 113, 118, 136, 137
James, William (*1842–1910*), 101, 108
Jewett, Caroline Perry (*1820–1891*), Sarah Jewett's mother, 12 f., 55, 90, 94, 127
Jewett, Mary Rice (*1785–1854*), Sarah Jewett's step-grandmother, 2, 3 f.
Jewett, Mary Rice (*1847–*), Sarah Jewett's sister, 2, 13, 14, 32, 41, 82, 84, 118
Jewett, Sarah Orne (*1794–1819*), Sarah Jewett's grandmother, 9, 10
Jewett, Sarah Orne (*September 3, 1849–June 24, 1909*), birth, 4, 13; schooling, 14, 15; first stories, 32 f.; first appearance in *The Atlantic*, 33, 41; 'Deephaven' sketches, 48 f.; her first book, 55; 'Deephaven,' 59, 63, 68, 82, 97, 100 f., 108, 120, 146; poor health, 15, 55, 68, 91; early recognition, 59, 62; 'Old Friends and New,' 68; 'Country By-Ways,' 68; friendship with Mrs. Fields, 69 f.; 'A Country Doctor,' 12, 72, 75, 82; trips to Europe, 73, 86, 112, 113; critical perceptions, 48, 51, 67, 80, 81, 92, 130, 131, 133, 148; 'The Mate of the Daylight,' 82; 'A Marsh Island,' 82; 'A White Heron,' 82, 84, 102; 'The King of Folly Island,' 85; French translation of her stories, 87; in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 87; 'Story of the Normans,' 91; 'The Life of Nancy,' 95;

'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' 100 f., 107 f., 112, 120, 137, 145, 150, 152; cruise to the West Indies, 112; 'A Native of Winby,' 113; 'The Queen's Twin,' 114; in the *Cornhill*, 114; 'The Tory Lover,' 116, 117, 120; Litt.D. from Bowdoin, 117; carriage accident and sickness, 119 f.; death, 132; edition of her letters, 136

Letters to: Whittier, 22; Sara Norton, 30, 106, 116; Horace Scudder, 34, 36, 42, 43 f., 53, 116; Howells, 37, 119, 125; Professor Parsons, 41, 51, 57, 68; Aldrich, 75, 76, 92, 93, 119, 122; Mrs. Fields, 77, 79, 80, 102, 103, 117, 123, 124; Mrs. Whitman, 87, 148; Mrs. Meynell, 122; Harriet Prescott Spofford, 128; Willa Cather, 129, 130; Charles Miner Thompson, 133

Jewett, Theodore Furber (*1787–1860*), Sarah Jewett's grandfather, 8 f., 19, 107

Jewett, Dr. Theodore Herman (*1815–1878*), Sarah Jewett's father, 12 f., 23, 24, 29, 30, 32, 50, 57, 68, 75, 90, 118, 128

Johnson, Dr., 65

Jones, John Paul, 116

Kipling, Rudyard (*1865–*), 95, 108, 139

La Fayette, General, 106

Lincoln, Abraham, 70

Longfellow, Henry W. (*1807–1882*), 59, 60, 125

Lowell, James Russell (*1819–1891*), 61, 71, 88, 89, 126, 141, 142, 143 f.

McClure's, 129

Mahan, Captain, 123

Marlowe, Christopher, 75

Melville, Herman (*1819–1891*), 62, 140, 152

Meynell, Alice (*1850–1922*), 121, 122

Millet, Jean François (*1814–1875*), 87

Mistral, Frédéric, 113

Mitchell, Dr. Weir, 83

Mitford, Miss (*1787–1855*), 56

Montaigne, 67

Nation, The, 54, 81

Norris, Frank (*1870–1902*), 112

Norton, Charles Eliot (*1827–1908*), 59, 125, 126

Norton, Sara, Charles Eliot's daughter, 30, 106, 116

Oliphant, Mrs., 56

Osgood, James R., Sarah Jewett's publisher, 54

Our Young Folks, 32

Page, Thomas Nelson (*1853–1922*), 61

Parsons, Theophilus (*1797–1882*), 39 f., 51, 57, 68, 90

Parsons, T. W., 59

Perry, Dr. William (*1788–1887*) Sarah Jewett's grandfather, 12

Perry, Abigail Gilman (*1789–1860*), Sarah Jewett's grandmother, 13, 30

Poe, Edgar Allan (*1809–1849*), 140

Pope, Alexander, 70

Pratt, Mrs., 85

Raeburn, Sir Henry, 67

Revue des Deux Mondes, 87

Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 70

Riverside, The, 32 f.
Roberts Bros., publishers, 54
Robinson, E. A. (*1869–*), 112
Rossetti, Christina (*1830–1894*), 74
Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 78

Sargent, John S., 85
Scott, Sir Walter, 67
Scribner's, 61
Scudder, Horace (*1838–1902*), 33, 36, 42, 43, 51, 53, 64, 92, 116, 133
Sévigné, Madame de, 113
Shaler, N. S., 60
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 69
Sidney, Sir Philip, 139
Slosson, Mrs. Annie Trumbull, 109
Smith, F. Hopkinson, 110
Smollett, Tobias, 14
Spofford, Mrs. Harriet Prescott, 128
Stedman, E. C., 110, 138
Sterne, Laurence, 14
Stowe, Harriet Beecher (*1812–1896*), 31, 66, 96, 99
Swedenborg, 39, 60
Swinburne, Algernon Charles, 143

Taylor, Bayard, 60
Tenniel, Sir John, 90
Tennyson, Alfred, Lord (*1809–1892*), 69, 74, 87, 88, 143
Terry, Ellen, 83
Thackeray, Miss, 64
Thackeray, William Makepeace (*1811–1863*), 64, 140, 143
Thaxter, Celia (*1835–1894*), 61, 78, 91
Theocritus, 89
Thompson, C. M., 133
Thoreau, Henry David (*1817–1862*), 20, 59
Tolstoy, Count Leo (*1828–1910*), 64, 66, 84, 140
Turgenieff, Ivan (*1818–1883*), 64, 133
Twain, Mark (*1835–1910*), 60, 61, 64, 140, 145

Vaughan, Henry, 65
Victoria, Queen, 115
Voltaire, 65

Ward, Mrs. Humphry, 87
Warner, Charles Dudley, 117
Wharton, Edith (*1862–*), 150 f.
Whitman, Sara, 87, 123, 148
Whitman, Walt (*1819–1892*), 62, 63, 138, 152
Whittier, John Greenleaf (*1807–1892*), 22, 55, 60, 61, 72, 73, 85, 88
Wiggin, Kate Douglas, 110
Wilkins, Mary E. *See* under Freeman
Wordsworth, Dorothy, 65

Zola, Émile (*1840–1902*), 64

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